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Serialised Sexual Violence in Teen Television Drama Series

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Serialised Sexual Violence in Teen Television Drama Series

This thesis examines the kinds of stories about teenage sexual violence that are enabled (or not) by US and British teen television drama series between 1990 and 2008. This genre is centrally concerned with issues of sexuality and, in particular, sexual vulnerability as teenage characters negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood. Sexual violence narratives are common within this context. This thesis argues that a fuller understanding of representations of sexual violence is enabled by contextualising these narratives in relation to overall series' and generic contexts. I employ a structural methodology to map where these storylines occur within series' and generic structures across fourteen texts, uncovering striking patterns that point to the value of analysing several programmes alongside one another. This then provides the starting point for a deeper textual analysis of how sexual violence functions narratively and ideologically. Through doing this, I am able to provide insights into a variety of different forces that shape how these narratives are framed. Contextualising my analysis of representations of sexual violence allows me to account for the specificities of episodic and serial narrative forms, the generic hybridity of individual programmes, the wider conventions of the teen drama series genre, the gender of the series' protagonist and US and British contexts. Additionally, I identify the genre's dominant sexual norms and explore how these norms intersect with representations of sexual violence.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, who may not have been around for most of my teenage years, but who installed in me, from the very start, a sense of self-belief that made this PhD possible.

Author's Declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Susan Berridge, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out in the Theatre, Film and Television Studies Department at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Dr. Karen Boyle and Professor Christine Geraghty during the period of October 2007 to September 2010.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Why sexual violence and why teen television drama series?

Halfway through my thesis, I completed narrative timelines of fourteen teen drama series upon which I mapped where sexual violence storylines occurred (see Appendix B). I displayed these timelines at a departmental training event, at which a visiting academic commented, ‘I thought *Smallville* was about Superman. Who knew that it was really about sexual violence?’ This is an over-generalisation - *Smallville* (The WB/CW, 2001-) is indeed about Clark Kent’s teenage years prior to becoming a super hero - yet it highlights two important tenets of this thesis: that sexual violence narratives are prevalent in teen drama series and that striking patterns begin to emerge when these storylines are positioned in the context of overall series’ and generic structures.

This thesis emerges out of three distinct but overlapping passions: feminism, television and ‘coming of age’ narratives. The media representation of key feminist issues, such as sexual violence, has been a central concern of mine for some time. In earlier studies, I have examined sexual violence representations across Hollywood and independent cinema and various television formats including soap operas and talk shows. The object of this thesis is to explore the relationship between representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence specifically in the context of the teen drama series, a genre that is centrally concerned with issues of sexuality as teenage characters mature. Their sexual development is key in marking this transition from childhood to adulthood and series often emphasise significant moments in this process such as first kisses, dates and sexual experiences. At the same time, the liminal teenage period is portrayed as a particularly vulnerable stage and teenage characters’ fallibility and vulnerability, including their sexual vulnerability, is a recurring and prominent generic theme. Programmes highlight this vulnerability through issue-led storylines involving sex and sexuality, underage drinking and drug use. What this thesis is interested in is exploring how this vulnerability is gendered and sexualised in significant ways.¹ The teen drama series is also a particularly conducive format from which to examine sexual violence representations.

¹ There is a risk of over-generalisation from focusing on just one issue and, thus, I have provided comparisons where relevant to other issue-led storylines such as those involving alcoholism, parental neglect and drug use.

Unlike mainstream news coverage, fictional narratives of sexual violence, and particularly drama series, are often better at engaging with feminist discourses, foregrounding the experience of the victim, condemning the perpetrator and offering multiple perspectives on this abuse through their ensemble casts and interweaving storylines (Cuklanz, 1996, 2000; Henderson, 2007: 7). In this way, they are potentially able to deal with this issue in a more complex and nuanced manner.

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence storylines in teen drama series, there has been a distinct lack of academic work in this area. Instead, feminist and teen television scholarship on textual representations has tended to focus quite narrowly on whether individual teenage characters (usually heterosexual females or homosexual males) constitute appropriate role models for young viewers, categorising images accordingly as positive or negative (Pender, 2002). Feminist sociological work on teenage sexuality and television echoes this concern with the role of the media on young viewers' behaviour and expectations. This concern is often justified by an underlying assumption that these viewers are more susceptible to televisual imagery than adults and, thus, are in need of guidance on how and what to watch (e.g. Vint, 2002).

In feminist sociological work, this concern with the impact of sexual media portrayals is supported by interviews with adolescents and teenagers, which reveal that television operates as a key source of their sexual information (Holland et al, 2004: 67). In turn, this thesis originates from a belief that representations matter. While they are not reflective of reality, they are generative and productive and, thus, have the capacity to inform and educate. As bell hooks eloquently summarises, the goals of feminism as a movement are to 'end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression' (2000: 1). Thus, I believe that, as a feminist television scholar, it is important to study representations of gender, sexuality and feminist issues such as sexual violence as a means of affecting change. At the same time, however, it is important not to over-emphasise or over-estimate the influence and power of television and/or the naivety of viewers. A critical emphasis on whether individual images are positive or negative seriously limits the scope of enquiry.

There are a number of inherent problems with measuring how positive individual images are, which this thesis aims to challenge and complicate. Firstly, this approach displays a patronising and overly simplistic notion of viewer identification which ignores the possibility of cross-gender identification and polysemic readings and conceives of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between what viewers watch and how they subsequently behave. Secondly, in this criticism, representations are often divorced from their context leading to incomplete analyses. For example, the ambiguities inherent in long-running series become obscured. Further, the rigidity of this approach is arguably ill-

suited to apply to a genre in which the fallibility of teenage characters is a prominent theme. In relation to feminist work on teen drama series, specifically, age is less carefully attended to than gender. The heroine of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB/CW, 1997-2003), for example, is frequently compared to the adult heroines of *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) with no acknowledgement that she is over ten years younger than these women (Daugherty, 2001; Lotz, 2006; Levine, 2007).

In feminist scholarship of teen drama series and television more widely, the emphasis on positive/negative images is synonymous with judging whether images are feminist or sexist. Underlying this work is an assumption that texts and their heroines are either governed by a patriarchal and inherently sexist ideology or are able to transcend this to incorporate feminist discourses. An example of this tendency is identified by Charlotte Brunsdon in what she calls the *ur* feminist article (2006: 44). To summarise briefly, in this article the feminist scholar selects a female-fronted text that is aimed at a female audience and explores it within the concerns and vocabulary of feminism, establishing a supposedly obvious feminist reading in which the text/heroine are dismissed as not being feminist enough. The author then mobilises her own engagement with the text and re-evaluates this dismissal, arguing that the text/heroine actually reveal the complexities of negotiating a feminist identity in the contemporary age.

Regardless of whether the feminist scholar celebrates or condemns an individual text/heroine, the polemical question of how feminist the text/heroine is prevails. This assumes that there is a better, more ideal way of representing women and feminist issues. One of the main problems with this assumption is that it presumes that there is a 'real', fixed, common notion of feminism in the first place. Yet, an array of different feminisms exist making this argument rather circuitous. It is for this reason that I have avoided entering into a debate about my own definition of feminism in this introduction. This sexist/feminist binary also means that issues of genre and medium specificity are overlooked. Further, the emphasis on heroines in isolation makes this work ill-suited to say anything broader about men, masculinity and gender relations, thereby risking losing the political relevance of feminism. This thesis seeks to redress this neglect by analysing both male and female sexual representations and paying close attention to the relationship between gender, sexuality and power.

Another tension arises in this work with the focus on popular texts. As Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley assert, 'many studies retain an implicit or explicit assumption that popular culture could still benefit from a "proper" feminist makeover' (2006: 11). However, popular culture and feminism have an uneasy relationship. Although, as Brunsdon (2006) identifies, many contemporary feminist scholars embrace popular

texts, at the same time, it is likely that their narrative structure supports the patriarchal status quo. This makes measuring how feminist a text is somewhat of a losing battle from the outset.

I acknowledge that I too am approaching my analysis of sexual violence representations from a feminist critical perspective. However, this thesis is not concerned with measuring these representations against an elusive (and non-existent) feminist ideal, but rather with examining the kinds of stories about sexual violence that are enabled (or not) by teen drama series. As John Fiske explains, ‘Structuralism and its developments are concerned to reveal and investigate the discursive nature of all cultural constructs, so structuralist theories of narrative have sought to explain the laws that govern its structure, not the accuracy of its representation of the real’ (1987: 131). I aim to challenge and complicate the feminist/sexist binary of much feminist television scholarship by contextualising my analyses of sexual violence in relation to narrative, series’ and generic structures. I argue that by doing so, a fuller understanding of how these representations function narratively and ideologically is offered. Structuralism has been accused of containing stray meanings by imposing binary frameworks on texts (Buxton, 1990). However, by using this approach my aim is to open up rather than close down possible interpretations by exploring how genre and medium specificity intersect with these representations.

Specifically, the aims of this thesis can be summarised as follows:

- to identify the textual markers of teen drama series and to establish the genre’s sexual norms
- to interrogate the relationship between these norms and representations of teenage sexual violence
- to explore how national, generic and medium specificity intersect with representations of sexual violence by situating these depictions in relation to narrative, series’ and generic structures and looking at both British and US programmes
- to investigate the kinds of stories about sexual violence that are enabled (or not) within this context

I address these concerns through an overview of sexual narratives across the genre (Chapter 4) into which I situate my subsequent analysis chapters on sexual violence (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). However, before I move on to the chapter outline, as this thesis is

centrally concerned with issues of genre, it is firstly important to define the teen drama series in more detail. Here, a tension emerges. On the one hand, one of the central concerns of this thesis is to map this genre more thoroughly. On the other hand, before this is possible, I need to establish some initial generic parameters in order to select a corpus of texts to analyse.

Defining the genre of teen drama series

There is a lack of scholarship on the teen drama series as a coherent genre with distinct textual markers. Instead, academic work tends to focus on individual programmes in isolation. Further, as I go on to discuss in Chapter 2, it tends to be ‘quality’ US programmes with cross-over adult appeal that are emphasised, such as *Buffy*, *Dawson’s Creek* (The WB/CW, 1998-2003) and, more recently, *Veronica Mars* (UPN/The CW, 2004-2007). There is a tension for the adult academic in studying texts that are arguably aimed at a much younger audience and, thus, many scholars feel the need to justify this attention by celebrating the ‘quality’ aspects of these texts. Teen drama series have a paradoxical claim to ‘quality’ as traditionally the teenager and the medium of television have not had access to critical approval (Hills, 2004). It follows that teen television scholarship that seeks to elevate these programmes tends to marginalise their ‘teen’ and televisual elements, emphasising instead the aspects that may appeal to adult viewers. ‘Quality’ is also viewed as synonymous with US programmes in this work resulting in a dearth of scholarship on teen drama series from other national contexts.

In recent years two collections of essays on teen television have emerged (Davis and Dickinson, 2004; Ross and Stein, 2008). Both of these books take a fluid approach to genre. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson define teen television more widely as programming that is aimed at, produced for and watched by a teenage audience (2004: 2) while Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein draw on Jason Mittell’s (2004) argument that the television text should not be the central site of generic meaning (2008: 4). These scholars all seek to expand rather than close down definitions of teen television and, thus, they define it in relation to audience (both real and intended), industrial and production contexts, channel identities and individual programmes. Yet, despite advocating this broad generic approach, they equate teen television largely with teen drama series. Almost all of the essays in these anthologies focus on this particular format with no acknowledgement of this bias. This risks obscuring the dramatic, serial and televisual specificity of these texts which this thesis aims to redress.

For the purposes of my analysis, I define the genre more narrowly. As this is a study of textual representations, I define the genre by its textual markers. Moseley provides a precedent here with her definition of the teen series in Glen Creeber's *The Television Genre Book* (2001: 41-3). She too emphasises the generic hybridity of these programmes, comparing teen drama series to soap operas in terms of their serial narrative structure, repetition and deferral of resolution as well as their emphasis on character, place and relationships. She adds that they have a soap-like tendency towards melodrama through the use of close ups and romantic pop scoring. At the same time, this intense emotionality is blended with self-consciousness, self-reflexivity and intertextuality, offering a broad address to viewers.

It is the content of teen drama series that Moseley conceives of as the specifically 'teen' element of the genre, observing that these programmes deal with issues that resonate with young viewers such as friendship, love, sex and impending adulthood. I would add that another vital element that distinguishes this genre from other television drama series more widely is the centrality of an ensemble teenage cast and a high school setting, at least in early seasons. I use the term 'teenager' here to refer to characters between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, although my emphasis on the high school setting means that these figures are all between the ages of thirteen and seventeen when series begin.

It is important to delineate these generic boundaries from the outset, as it is this definition that has determined the scope of my thesis. The centrality of a group of teenage characters, for example, excludes programmes such as *Charmed* (The WB, 1998-2006) and *Angel* (The WB, 1999-2004) which Moseley includes in her study. Although both of these programmes are aimed at a teenage audience, they predominantly feature adult characters. The distinction of teen drama series from other programmes on the basis of their adult to teenage character ratio is difficult to sustain. Several of the series I am looking at prominently feature adult characters who have their own storylines. Yet, an important distinction can be made in the *relationship* of these adult figures to teenage characters. In my definition of the genre, these adults are intimately connected to the teenagers, occupying the roles of either their teacher or parent. Thus, my analysis also omits a discussion of family and community dramas such as *Gilmore Girls* (The WB/CW, 2000-2007), which despite having a female teenage protagonist also features adults who are largely unconnected to her. Finally, as this research is interested in the in-between teenage period as a time of sexual development, vulnerability and initial sexual experiences, I exclude college dramas such as *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) and *Greek* (ABC, 2007-). While these programmes also feature teenage protagonists in their first seasons, they arguably have different sexual preoccupations.

Because this thesis is centrally concerned with these programmes as *series* and with the relationship between representations of teenage sexual violence and narrative and series' structure, it was necessary to watch each programme in its entirety. In some cases, for example, sexual violence narratives would disappear and recur again several episodes or seasons later or would provide crucial background on particular characters which would come to inform later storylines. Further, I am interested in how the wider sexual culture of the genre intersects with these representations. Thus, in order to ensure availability of entire series, I completed my analysis from DVD box sets. In recent years there has been some debate over whether studying box sets of programmes, divorced from the 'noise' of television, constitutes studying television (Kompore, 2006; Hills, 2007). On the contrary, this approach allows me to emphasise a distinctly televisual element of these texts: their seriality. Using box sets enables me to discuss these programmes as *series* rather than reducing my analysis to individual moments or episodes. Box sets are also particularly well suited for close textual analysis, allowing unlimited and repeated access to the texts of my study, including those that have been cancelled and are no longer shown on television, as well as providing valuable additional materials such as commentaries and programme trailers. Scheduling is, thus, not a main concern of this thesis, however, where relevant I do provide discussions of the channel identities and time-slots of particular programmes (e.g. see Chapter 8).

Despite these advantages, working from box sets also imposed some boundaries on my thesis. For example, I have omitted a discussion of teen soap operas such as *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995-) which are not available in their entirety on DVD.² (Even if *Hollyoaks* was available, as it airs each weekday it would be incredibly difficult to watch in full.) This research aims to set aside questions of worth and value to judge the teen drama series on its own terms and to concentrate on the internal rules of the genre for the production of meaning. Yet, it is important to note that DVD culture, like television criticism more widely, involves a process of valorisation by isolating and creating boundaries around specific texts (Hills, 2007: 47). As Matt Hills explains, the question of what television programmes get released on DVD, at least partially, reinforces hierarchies of quality (49). Taking this into account, I have tried, where available, to include programmes with more niche appeal that were not necessarily commercially or critically successful.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen fourteen teen drama series to analyse, including the US series *Beverly Hills 90210* (Fox, 1990-2000), *My So-Called Life* (ABC,

² Further research needs to be undertaken on *Hollyoaks* as this is a programme which regularly addresses issues of teenage sexuality and sexual violence. To my knowledge, it is the only teen series to deal with the subject of male rape.

1994-1995), *Buffy*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Freaks and Geeks* (NBC, 1999-2000), *Smallville*, *The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007), *One Tree Hill* (The WB/CW, 2003-), *Veronica Mars*, *Friday Night Lights* (NBC, 2006-) and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-) as well as three British series, *Hex* (Sky One, 2004-2005), *Sugar Rush* (E4, 2005-2006) and *Skins* (E4, 2007-) (For fuller details of these programmes, see Appendix A). These programmes are part of a much broader generic corpus and represent only some of the research undertaken. For example, when compiling a body of texts to analyse, my initial viewing included other teen series, such as *Roswell* (The WB/UPN, 1999-2002) and *Party of Five* (Fox, 1994- 2000). I chose to focus on fourteen programmes as this provides a manageable but still wide enough sample to be able to determine structural, narrative and ideological patterns in where sexual violence narratives are positioned and how they function. My reasons for omitting *Roswell* and *Party of Five* were due to their similarity to other texts. *Roswell*, like *Smallville*, focuses on teenage aliens. However, I chose to focus on *Smallville* as it is the longer-running of the two series. Similarly, *Party of Five* shares much in common with *Beverly Hills*, in terms of its emphasis on episodic social issue storylines in its early seasons. Again, I chose to look at *Beverly Hills* as it is the longest-running teen drama series to date. Further, *Party of Five* focuses on five orphans, three of whom are not teenagers when the series begins.

The fourteen programmes I selected to study are diverse, allowing me to take into consideration differences between them in terms of the gender of their protagonist(s), their series' length, generic hybridity and air dates. Thus, five of the series are female-fronted, four are male-fronted, three feature male/female sibling protagonists and two have ensemble casts.³ Some ran for several seasons and continue to this day and others were cancelled after one season. Three are teen/supernatural hybrids, while *Veronica Mars* blends teen and noir elements. They also encompass a range of different channel identities. Eleven are American and three are British, allowing me to consider how specific national broadcasting and social contexts affect sexual violence narratives. The series span from 1990 to this day, enabling me also to discern developments across the genre over time as well as counter accusations that structuralism and genre analyses are profoundly ahistorical approaches (Neale, 1990; Seiter, 1992).

The time frame of the thesis is determined by teen television scholarship which conceives of the genre as beginning in 1990 with *Beverly Hills* (Moseley, 2001; Dickinson, 2004). The end date is imposed by time constraints, to give myself enough time to write up

³ Although it is important to note that series' protagonists can change throughout the course of the programme (see Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion). I have also noted the gender of each series' protagonist, where applicable, in Appendix A.

the research findings. Some of the texts I am looking at continue beyond this date and, thus, I look only at the first seven seasons of *Smallville*, the first two seasons of *Friday Night Lights*, the first five seasons of *One Tree Hill*, the first season of *Gossip Girl* and the first two seasons of *Skins*. However, I do occasionally refer to sexual violence storylines that continue beyond the end point of my thesis. I also look to newer teen drama series such as *90210* (The CW, 2008-) and *Glee* (Fox, 2009-) in my thesis conclusion.

Chapter Outline

The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to outline the origins and main aims of the thesis by identifying gaps in existing academic literature that it seeks to address, to define the genre of the teen drama series and to delineate the scope of the research.

Chapter 2 consists of a literature review which explores these issues further. My research intervenes in three distinct but overlapping areas of research: teen television scholarship, feminist television criticism and feminist work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence, which largely derives from sociology. The chapter is split into three sections accordingly. The first section provides an overview of the key academic debates surrounding teen television. I highlight that there is a tension for adult academics in studying texts that are arguably not aimed at them and in this section, I explore the implications of this both in terms of what is studied and the scope of enquiry. I emphasise that issues of format, genre and medium specificity are frequently overlooked in this work in favour of elevating ‘exceptional’ texts as worthy of study. As this thesis is primarily concerned with textual representations, I then move on to focus on scholarship on the representation of teenage characters and sexuality as well as social issues.

This emphasis on representational politics provides a bridge to the second section on textual feminist television scholarship, in which I address the critical emphasis on female characters at the expense of considerations of males, masculinity and broader gender relations. I end by outlining the small body of work on media representations of sexual violence which this thesis draws on and develops. One of the main distinctions between my work and this work, however, is an emphasis on contextualising these representations in relation to narrative, series’ and generic structures. Indeed, existing scholarship in this area, while providing a useful precedent for this thesis, focuses almost exclusively on representations of heterosexual rape in individual episodes that are divorced from wider series’ contexts.

In the third section I focus on feminist work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence more broadly, which largely derives from sociology. I begin by outlining the key debates surrounding teenage sexuality and emphasising how this scholarship overlaps with both teen and feminist television criticism. One of the aims of this thesis is to facilitate a dialogue between these different areas of study. I then consider the growing body of feminist work on the prevalence of sexual violence in teenage heterosexual dating relationships and the smaller body of literature on teenage sexual harassment. This work is particularly valuable as it situates discussions of teenage sexual violence in relation to the broader context of the social construction of gendered sexuality. However, despite this interest in teenage sexual culture, I highlight that scholarship on teenage dating violence, in particular, tends to emphasise the *violent* rather than the *sexual* nature of this abuse, thereby obscuring questions about the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. I end this chapter by establishing a working definition of sexual violence, drawing on Catherine MacKinnon's (1982) conception of rape as primarily a *sexual* crime and Liz Kelly's (1988) broad definition of sexual violence as a continuum. In doing so, this project seeks to expand the existing critical emphasis on representations of rape to include a consideration of verbal and non-physical forms of sexual violence. My emphasis on the relationship between this abuse and serial structures fits neatly with this notion of a continuum, as mapping this abuse across serial structures allows me to establish representational and narrative patterns across several different forms of abuse, while still allowing me to account for the specificity of certain types of violence.

Following on from the critical context identified in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework of my research and the rationale for this approach. One of the main challenges of this thesis has been to find a way to discuss the programmes as *television*, as *series* and as a coherent *genre*, rather than focusing on individual sexual violence moments, episodes and/or storylines. Several of the programmes I am examining span multiple seasons and encompass over a hundred episodes each and, thus, there is a difficulty in managing this amount of material. In order to do this, in this chapter I turn to three separate but interlinked methodologies: textual analysis, genre analysis and structuralism. Textual analysis allows me to account for the specificities of each sexual violence representation, while genre and structural analyses enable me to discern broader patterns in which sexual violence narratives are positioned across generic and series' structures. This then provides the context for a deeper analysis of how sexual violence functions both narratively and ideologically across the genre, as I go on to explore in Chapters 5 to 8. After exploring each of these methods in turn, I then outline the findings of the narrative timeline research. The patterns uncovered through this research indicate

the value of analysing programmes in relation to one another rather than focusing on a particular series in isolation.

As this thesis is centrally concerned with contextualising representations of sexual violence within broader series' and generic structures and with the relationship between this violence and representations of teenage sexuality, Chapter 4 explores the genre's formal organisation and also provides an overview of its sexual norms. In this chapter I draw on Moseley's assertion that, like the soap opera, at the heart of the teen drama series are place, characters and relationships (2001: 42). I thus explore the relationship between narrative organisation and space as well as the genre's dominant character types and relationships. However, before I do this, I examine the genre's organisation of time, as this, I argue, is a key distinguishing feature between the drama series and the soap opera. In each of these three sections, I situate the teen drama series in relation to fictional television narratives more widely. This allows me to account for medium specificity as well as to discern the specifically 'teen' elements of the genre. As I argue throughout this thesis, an understanding of the formal elements of teen drama series is crucial to fully interpret representations of sexual violence. In each section I also consider the similarities and differences between US and British programmes, which I develop further in Chapters 7 and 8.

In the fourth and final section, I look at the genre's dominant sexual norms. The aim of this chapter is to identify these norms in order to establish a sexual context into which the subsequent analysis chapters will be situated. This then allows me to discern wider connections between representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence. One of the main insights to be gained from a structural analysis of representations of teenage sexuality across the genre is that these sexual depictions are distinctly gendered. I explore the ramifications of this on sexual violence storylines in the following analysis chapters.

From here, the thesis takes the form of four analysis chapters on sexual violence narratives, the content of which is determined by the structural patterns uncovered through my narrative timeline research. In each chapter, as well as drawing on relevant academic literature, I also include close textual analysis of sexual violence representations from several teen drama series in order to illustrate that these patterns transcend individual programmes to encompass the genre as a whole. Chapters 5 and 6 focus exclusively on US programmes and Chapter 8 focuses only on British series. Chapter 7 considers British and US series alongside one another in order to highlight structural patterns that transcend national boundaries. I outline the motivations that determine this chapter structure in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 examines the most common form of sexual violence storyline: the self-contained episodic narrative. In these storylines the sexual violence narrative is introduced, explored and resolved all within the episode's timeslot, without extending into subsequent instalments. In particular, episodic sexual violence narratives can be viewed as part of the genre's broader tradition of responsibly educating young viewers about social issues. In this way, they can be linked to other episodic issue-led narratives involving, for example, underage drinking, drug consumption and shoplifting. These narratives operate to emphasise the vulnerability and associated fallibility of teenage characters as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood. They follow a common narrative structure: the teenager tries to exert excessive independence (by underage drinking, dressing in revealing clothing and/or throwing a party while their parents are away), events then spiral quickly out of their control and by the episode's close, they learn an important lesson about the dangers of trying to grow up too fast. By considering sexual violence episodes in relation to these other issue-led narratives across the genre, it becomes clear that this age-related vulnerability is gendered and sexualised in significant ways. For example, when a heterosexual male character gets drunk, at worst they receive a stern warning. In contrast, when a heterosexual female character gets drunk, she is often subject to sexual abuse. This gendering of sexual violence narratives is connected to broader representations of teenage sexuality across the genre, as Chapter 4 indicates.

In Chapter 5, I argue that there are four main narrative functions of sexual violence in these episodic storylines: it is framed as a social issue; operates as a warning about the vulnerability of (female) youth; is a catalyst for romance; and/or a mystery-to-be-solved (see Appendix C). I then consider the dominant narrative structure of each, drawing on examples from *Beverly Hills*, *My So-Called Life*, *One Tree Hill* and *Smallville* respectively, before moving on to consider ideological patterns across all four. These episodic examples span from 1991 to 2005, which also allows me to identify developments across the genre over time. I consider how the episodic narrative form affects how sexual violence storylines are framed, drawing on and complicating arguments by earlier teen television scholars that this form is unable to deal with issues in any kind of complexity (see Wilcox, 1999).

It is this latter debate that informs my analysis in Chapter 6, which focuses on sexual violence narratives that span multiple episodes. I question whether their longer structure necessarily allows for a more complex and nuanced engagement with sexual violence. An interesting finding that emerges from this research is that while teen television scholars have typically dismissed episodic issue-led narratives in favour of serial narrative arcs, episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives function in broadly

similar ways. While overarching narratives explore the aftermath of the victim in more depth than self-contained episodes and also afford the perpetrator slightly more of a back-story, they largely promote an individualised understanding of sexual violence that reinforces rather than complicates hegemonic gender ideals.

Structural analysis reveals that these overarching storylines are almost always positioned in relation to teenage romantic relationships: sexual violence operates either to advance or frustrate a romantic union or to highlight the dangers of choosing the wrong man (as when sexual violence follows the end of a relationship, for example) (see Appendix D). I argue that this positioning has crucial implications for the kinds of stories told about sexual violence. I examine each of these four main narrative functions of overarching sexual violence storylines in turn, outlining the narrative structure of each and drawing on specific examples from several teen drama series, including *Beverly Hills, The O.C.*, *Dawson's Creek*, *One Tree Hill* and *Friday Night Lights*, before examining ideological patterns across all four.

Situating a number of overarching sexual violence narratives alongside each other in order to determine their dominant narrative functions also allows me to consider narratives that differ from these norms. Homophobic abuse narratives, for example, are the only overarching sexual violence narrative that are not embedded within romantic relationships. Instead, like episodic narratives, these remain stories that are primarily about issues of personal identity. Representations of homosexuality in teen drama series have received more critical attention than other depictions of teenage sexuality (Davis, 2004; Battis, 2007). However, scholarship has tended to focus on coming out storylines in isolation. What this analysis misses by focusing on these revelations outside the broader context of the series is that they are almost always preceded by homophobic abuse narratives. This narrative pattern suggests that 'coming out' is the problem for the homosexual character to overcome, rather than widespread homophobia, reinforcing the genre's ideological emphasis on personal responsibility.

Chapter 7 departs from the US focus of the previous two chapters to consider US and British female-fronted teen drama series alongside each other. This chapter explores the relationship between the gender of the series' protagonist, the representation of sexual violence and narrative and series' structure. My analysis reveals striking structural differences in where sexual violence is positioned in series featuring heterosexual female protagonists as compared to those featuring male or male/female protagonists or those with ensemble casts. *Buffy*, *Veronica Mars* and *Hex* all feature sexual violence in their pilot and finale episodes, suggesting that feminist issues, such as sexual violence, remain central concerns throughout these female-fronted series. Further, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* both

feature sexual violence narratives that run concurrently, enabling connections to be made across different forms of abuse. I situate a discussion of these representations in relation to feminist critical debates of female-fronted teen drama series which argue that with the centrality of a female perspective, these series offer a particularly conducive site from which to expose and critique gender inequalities (Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008). However, my intention in this chapter is not to replicate the existing feminist focus by arguing that these texts are more feminist than other series, but rather to complicate this approach by considering how genre and medium specificity intersect with these representations.

The British teen drama series *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* form the basis of my final analysis chapter. Chapter 8 addresses the different discursive construction of the figure of the teenager in a British context and argues that this has crucial implications for representations of sexual violence in these series. In contrast to US programmes, in which the teenager is constructed as a vulnerable figure in need of adult guidance and support, in British series the teenager is portrayed as much more independent. I highlight that this construction is inextricably linked to both the broadcasting and social contexts that these series emerge from. Thus, here I provide a brief overview of the history of British youth television, looking specifically at the birth of Channel 4 and E4, before moving on to analyse sexual violence narratives in *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* in more detail. As there is a dearth of academic work on these British teen drama series, I draw on wider academic, popular and journalistic debates on youth television in this context.

In the final chapter (Chapter 9), I conclude by discussing the findings and contributions of my research more broadly and how this relates to current academic debates in the fields of teen and feminist television scholarship. I then move on to reflect upon the methodologies employed and their potentials and limitations, before pointing to some future areas of research.

Overall, then, this thesis provides a critical account of the kinds of stories about teenage sexual violence that are enabled (or not) by US and British teen drama series. Throughout, I argue that a fuller understanding of how sexual violence functions narratively and ideologically is offered by contextualising these narratives in relation to broader series' and generic structures. This contextualisation provides insights into a variety of different forces that shape how these narratives are framed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Troubling Teens and Anxious Adults

Introduction

The teen drama series is a genre that is centrally concerned with issues of sexuality, yet although there is a growing body of work on teen television (and teen drama series, specifically), sexual representations have been largely overlooked. Both feminist and teen television scholarship tends to focus quite narrowly on the role model credentials of individual characters and is, therefore, ill-suited to consider gender relations and sexual narratives more broadly. Instead, work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence tends to derive from sociology. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to facilitate a dialogue between these three areas of scholarly research; teen television criticism, feminist television scholarship and feminist work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence more broadly.

Although these three areas of scholarship are distinct, they share similar concerns and approaches. Central to all this work is a sense of dis-identity. Angela McRobbie (2004) uses the term ‘dis-identity’ to refer specifically to the generational distance invoked by young women from second-wave feminism. Here I apply the term more broadly to describe the distance between the adult academic and the teenage subject of their research. The teen television scholar studies texts that are arguably not aimed at them but at much younger viewers. The feminist television academic is often concerned with designating the appropriate ‘positive’ role models for young females to follow. Lastly, the sociologist measures the effects of media images of sexuality on a teenage audience. In all cases, teen television (and television more widely) is looked at through an adult lens. This dis-identity has impacted on the study of teenagers and teen television in crucial ways, shaping not only *what* is studied, but also the scope of the enquiry. Analysing and judging teen programming *as* teen programming is rarely a key concern.

This thesis aims to move beyond this recurring concern with the effects of television images on teenage viewers to explore the genre of the teen drama series in more depth. This chapter, therefore, will consider the gaps and limitations of this existing teen and feminist television scholarship as well as work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence in order to establish a framework for developing a methodology in Chapter 3. I

will not only focus on negative aspects of this work, however, but will also highlight key authors, ideas, arguments, essays and books that have been influential in shaping my own approach to examining representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence across teen drama series. I will begin by examining recurring debates in teen television scholarship before moving on to focus on feminist textual television criticism. In the final section, I explore sociological work on teenage sexuality and feminist work on sexual violence more broadly, before offering some brief conclusions.

Teen Television Scholarship

Reflecting the dis-identity at the heart of teen television scholarship, Davis and Dickinson, authors of the first academic anthology dedicated exclusively to teen television, argue that, ‘there is still a reluctance amongst academics to entrench themselves in certain aspects of teen TV which lie outside our direct political and aesthetic priorities’ (2004: 5). This first section explores the implications of this reluctance in more depth. I will begin by examining the impact of this dis-identity between the adult academic and teenage viewer on conceptions of genre, drawing heavily on debates about quality and national context. I will then move on to focus on the representational politics of teen drama series and their depiction of social issue storylines.

‘But What About Buffy?’

Television Genre and Issues of Quality: Elevating the

‘Exceptional’ Teen Text

Television is a denigrated medium. Unlike film and literature, it has not traditionally been considered as an art form. Instead, it connotes domesticity, commercialism, triviality, repetition and diversion (Goode, 2003: 106). Reflecting this, television studies has its roots in sociology and mass communications, in contrast to film studies which is rooted in humanities (Kaplan, 1992: 247). Within television studies, further evaluative judgments take place that are inextricably connected to the notion of genres. As Mittell explains, television genres are activated in systems of cultural value; nearly every genre is located on a highbrow/lowbrow cultural axis (2004: 15). For example, soap opera has traditionally been looked down upon in contrast to more ‘serious’ and ‘worthy’ genres such as the documentary. The teen drama series, with its serial form and emphasis on melodrama and dialogue, borrows elements from the soap opera and, thus, has rarely had access to critical approval or prestige. This critical denigration is

heightened by the young age of its viewers. As Davis and Dickinson explain, there is a tendency to view teen television as ‘disposable’, ‘ephemeral’ and, by association, ‘low culture’ partially due to the liminal status of its intended viewers who could conceivably quickly grow out of this programming (2004: 7). These judgments are rarely made explicit by scholars, but nevertheless shape both what is selected as a worthy object of study and how it is approached.

It is only in recent years that teen television scholarship has emerged and, even then, there is often a clear discomfort in this work in relation to the adult academic studying texts that are arguably not aimed at them. This adult/teen tension is manifested in two main ways. The first is a tendency to look down upon these texts. This is exemplified by Neil Badmington’s essay on *Roswell* in which he argues that, ‘against all odds, an apparently harmless example of teen television offers a radical challenge to traditional ways of understanding who “we” and “our” others might be’ (2004: 173). This statement is imbued with condescension and surprise that a teen programme such as *Roswell* could offer anything of value to the adult academic. The second, and more common, way that this tension is expressed is through the tendency for scholars to elevate particular texts as ‘exceptional’, thereby at once justifying their interest in them and divorcing them from their wider generic context. If teen television is already a denigrated genre, it follows that to justify their interest, adult academics studying these texts seek to remove them from ‘teen’ generic frameworks.

This tendency to argue for a programme’s ‘quality’ status by highlighting its uniqueness illustrates a key bias against the concept of genre. As Jane Feuer (1987) explains, the French term ‘genre’ literally means type and ‘genre theory deals with the way in which a work may be considered to belong to a class of related works’ (1992: 138). Thus, traditionally, genre analysis has sought to identify and highlight similarities across bodies of texts. With its emphasis on textual repetition, then, genre analysis works against common standards of evaluation that are based on, ‘a romantic theory of art that places the highest value on the concepts of originality, personal creativity, and the idea of the individual artist as genius’ (Feuer, 1992: 142). As Feuer further notes, the concept of genre was initially used in film studies to condemn mass-produced films for their lack of originality. Conversely, many genre analysts focus on generic hybridity and variation, but again this is often in the service of arguing for an individual programme’s exceptionality from other generic texts.

This opposition between the formulaic generic text and the innovative art form is played out across much of the scholarship on *Buffy*, which typically makes claims for the series’ difference and exceptionality from other teen drama series. Indeed, I have titled this

subsection ‘But What About *Buffy*?’ in response to the number of times I have heard this ubiquitous question after presenting conference papers on the teen drama series genre more widely. Scholarship on the programme is often at pains to stress how it transcends and is, therefore, better than all other teen drama series before and after it. Indicating the dominant critical view that *Buffy* is special, it is the most widely studied of all teen drama series, with numerous books devoted to the programme alone as well as several chapters and articles and an online journal, *Slayage*.⁴ Further, *Buffy* is the only teen drama series to be included in the BFI TV Classics series (Billson, 2005), alongside adult dramas and documentaries such as *Prime Suspect* (ITV, 1991- 2006) (Jermyn, 2010) and *Civilisation* (BBC2, 1969) (Conlin, 2009). Similarly, James Lyons and Mark Jancovich include an essay on *Buffy* (Parks, 2003) in their *Quality Popular Television* book. *Buffy* is also the only teen drama series to be included in *The Guardian*’s top fifty television dramas of all time, compiled by the newspaper’s television writers (2010).

The passion and fandom of *Buffy* critics is remarked upon by Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (2007) in their introduction to the latest anthology of criticism on the series, *Undead TV*. They argue that television criticism more widely demands affective engagement with its objects of study and, thus, that academic fans of *Buffy* can often be the most passionate and harsh critics of the programme (2007: 7). While this may be true of television studies, in the work on *Buffy* specifically, the ‘affective engagement’ of the scholar frequently becomes synonymous with an emphasis on viewing pleasure. Audience research on the series almost exclusively engages with fellow, active fans rather than ordinary viewers (Kearney, 2007; Hill and Calcutt, 2007; Middleton, 2007). Therefore, far from being harsh, this scholarship tends to champion the series, demonstrating a reluctance to examine aspects of the text that may be less progressive such as its representations of race and class (Pender, 2002). However, removing this programme from broader generic structures and focusing on pleasure means that certain issues, such as its teen generic precedents and pervasive representations of male violence against women, have been largely overlooked in *Buffy* scholarship. Certainly *Buffy* does approach particular narratives in a way that differs from most other teen drama series, but as I stress in Chapters 4, 5 and 7, it also holds striking similarities to other teen drama series, particularly supernatural and female-fronted programmes.

4 Books include Kaveney, 2001; Wilcox and Lavery, 2002; South, 2003; Billson, 2005; Wilcox, 2005; Levine and Parks, 2007. Articles and chapters include Wilcox, 1999; Playden, 2001; Vint, 2002; Siemann, 2002; Parks, 2003; Bavidge, 2004. The journal can be found at www.slayageonline.com.

This tendency to study particular programmes in isolation, divorced from broader generic frameworks, is reflective of teen television scholarship more widely. Scholarship of teen drama series, in particular, rarely conceptualises this format as a coherent generic category with distinct textual markers. As well as work on *Buffy*, there are book-length studies on individual series such as *Beverly Hills* (McKinley, 1997) and *My So-Called Life* (Byers and Lavery, 2007) and chapters and articles on programmes such as *Smallville* (Feasey, 2008; Battis, 2006; Banks, 2004), *Dawson's Creek* (Brooker, 2001; Davis, 2004; Dickinson, 2004; Birchall, 2004; Hills, 2004) and, more recently, *Veronica Mars* (Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008; Mittell, 2009). When genre is discussed, it is frequently in relation to the generic hybridity of particular texts such as *Buffy's* use of horror elements or the blend of teen elements with film noir in *Veronica Mars*. Therefore, in this work the teen drama series is paradoxically and implicitly defined by its very *lack* of distinct generic markers.

Scholarship on the generic hybridity of particular texts can lead to very insightful analyses, such as Sue Turnbull's (2008) essay on the relationship between film melodrama and male representations in *The O.C.* and Jenny Bavidges' (2004) consideration of literary antecedents in relation to representations of girlhood in *Buffy*. However, this emphasis on hybridity often comes at the expense of considerations of the *teen* and *televisual* elements of these programmes. This is illustrated by Bavidge's analysis of a scene in which Buffy has temporarily lost her powers (312 'Helpless'). She argues that Buffy's red, hooded jacket in this scene signals her vulnerability by connoting Little Red Riding Hood, yet she overlooks other aspects of the scene that could add to her reading (2004: 48). Buffy's helplessness is not only signalled by her costume, but by the scene's setting in a dark, moonlit, shadowy street, the use of longshots which emphasise her aloneness, ominous non-diegetic music which speeds up as Buffy becomes increasingly afraid and the diegetic sounds of men's laughter, dogs barking and the sinister humming of a monster that seeks to harm her. Notably, Bavidge is an English professor and, thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that she chooses to focus on *Buffy's* literary aspects instead of considerations of medium specificity. Her reading of the scene is not necessarily incorrect, but the interdisciplinary nature of popular television scholarship more widely can mean that the distinctly televisual elements of texts are overlooked.

It is notable that Bavidge uses a literary rather than a televisual heroine as an antecedent to Buffy. Turnbull similarly turns not to television but to cinematic examples of melodrama when considering precursors for the male representations in *The O.C.*. This reflects the tendency of scholars to import terms from film and literary genre theory when studying television genre, rather than accounting for the specificities of the medium. As

television is not a culturally revered medium, it follows that criticism of teen drama series that seeks to elevate the quality status of these programmes tends to marginalise the televisual aspects of these texts. When making bids for the quality status of individual teen drama series, Hills (2004) and Davis and Dickinson (2004) emphasise the programme's cinematic elements, such as high production values, special effects and the crossover of cinematic stars and directors.⁵ The influence of the cinematic horror genre is frequently emphasised in *Buffy* scholarship, with Carol Clover's (1992) work on the horror film's 'final girl' widely referenced (Bavidge, 2004; Kaveney, 2001; Hammond, 2004; Fuchs, 2007; McCracken, 2007; Middleton, 2007). In contrast, the generic teen influence on *Buffy* is rarely acknowledged.

The emphasis on cinematic elements when making claims for the 'quality' status of particular teen dramas is indicative of television studies more widely. For example, in their *Quality Popular Television* book, Lyons and Jancovich begin by citing Peter Kramer's argument that an average episode of *Buffy* is better than any contemporary horror film (2003: 1). Robert Thompson (1996) also foregrounds cinematic traits in his analysis of US quality television, emphasising these programmes' high production values, large casts, authorship and cross-over cinema stars. He ends his chapter by citing journalistic literature that argues that television is now superior to the movies (1996: 192). One of the main problems with applying literary and cinematic genre theories to television is that it means that these programmes are not judged as *television*. As Mittell notes, this then opens television programmes up to unfair dismissal (2004: xiii). Indeed, to judge television programmes by cinematic and/or literary standards risks obscuring medium specificity as well as texts that do not necessarily have high production values or cinematic personnel behind them. I expand on these problems of conceptualising television genre in the following chapter.

Further, in the case of teen television scholarship, 'quality' is inextricably related to national context. Jancovich and Lyons posit quality television as a distinctly US phenomenon (2003: 1), while Thompson's (1996) chapter on quality in his book on television's second golden age looks exclusively at American fictional television. This conflation of 'quality' television with US texts in teen television scholarship means that British programmes have been vastly overlooked. To my knowledge, there is no academic writing on contemporary British teen drama series. The limited scholarship that does exist on British youth programming has tended to focus on music and/or magazine formats (Lury, 2001; Osgerby, 2004).

⁵ For example, Hills explains that the association of Kevin Williamson, a cinematic director, with *Dawson's Creek* elevates the series' quality status (2004: 54).

The scholarly emphasis on US texts can be partially explained by the dominance of US teen drama series themselves. In her essay on the teen series in Creeber's *The Television Genre Book* Moseley concludes that, 'the teenager remains profoundly American', thereby implying that the teen drama series is a uniquely American genre (2001: 43). Indeed, the genre is marked by US constructs such as cheerleaders, jocks and home-coming dances. Writing in 2001, Moseley is not wrong. However, in the past five years, British teen drama series have become more prominent, thus, this thesis aims to challenge the existing scholarly focus on US texts by considering British texts also. Moseley (2007), herself, has recently addressed this imbalance, with an essay on the development of dramatic programming for teens in a British context between 1968 and 1982. To my knowledge, she is the only scholar to examine British teen drama series and, thus, I look at this piece in more detail in Chapter 8.

The 'quality' status of individual programmes is not only configured on the basis of their national context and non-televisual elements, but also by their audience appeal. As Brunson asserts in relation to television studies more widely, there are always issues of power at stake in notions such as quality and judgment (1990: 73). Teenagers lack social power and thus, the 'quality' status of individual teen texts is almost always configured on adult terms. It is no coincidence that programmes with cross-generational appeal such as *Buffy* and *Dawson's Creek* are repeatedly discussed, at the expense of programmes with more exclusively teenage appeal. As Hills explains, "'Quality teen TV' remains a problematic category because it threatens to disrupt established power relations that associate all things teen with negative stereotypes such as 'not-quite-adult'" (2004: 65). Therefore, paradoxically, when bidding for a particular teen drama's 'quality' status, the adult academic tends to emphasise aspects of the text that may appeal to adult viewers, while simultaneously marginalising the 'not-quite-adult' or teen aspects of the text.⁶ Hills argues that *Dawson's Creek's* quality status can be attributed to the unusual levels of maturity, self-reflexivity, agency and articulacy that it imbues on its teenage characters, thereby attempting to 'powerfully revalue discourses of the teenager' (2004: 54). In other words, for a teen drama such as *Dawson's Creek* to achieve the status of quality television, its teenagers must act like adults.

⁶ Audience research on *Buffy* frequently emphasises the cross generational adult appeal of the series, at the expense of considering the programme's teen appeal. Kearney (2007) analyses the series' websites and message boards in order to investigate cross-generational forms of identification, while Mary Hammond (2004) also examines the cross-generational appeal of *Buffy*, considering how the series enables polysemic readings that could incorporate both adult and teenagers' needs.

As noted in the previous chapter, in recent years two anthologies on teen television have emerged which explicitly set out to challenge this critical emphasis on isolated 'exceptional' texts (Davis and Dickinson, 2004; Ross and Stein, 2008). Again the essays comprising these collections focus almost exclusively on individual programmes, but they are situated in relation to a broader structure which considers teen television as a coherent genre and framed by introductions which usefully interrogate and challenge the notion of teen television as unworthy of academic attention.

Both books take a fluid and expansive approach to genre, aiming to challenge existing preconceptions about what 'teen television' encompasses by combining close textual analysis of specific programmes with considerations of industry and reception. Each is split into three sections which approach teen television from different angles. Davis and Dickinson divide their book in relation to genre, consumption and identity, while Ross and Stein include sections on industry, texts and reception. Ross and Stein, in particular, draw upon Mittell's (2004) approach to television genre, in which he challenges the traditional view that generic meaning is located in the text (2008: 4). Instead, he argues that, 'we need to look beyond the text as the locus for genre, locating genres within the complex interrelations between texts, industries, audiences and historical contexts' (2004: 10).

In many ways, this fluid approach to genre is useful and refreshing, challenging the existing scholarly focus on a narrow range of US 'quality' texts with cross-over adult appeal. Davis and Dickinson's book, for example, includes two essays on Australian children's and teen drama series (Rutherford, 2004; Douglas and McWilliam, 2004) while Ross and Stein's anthology features an essay, by Ross herself, on the Canadian teen drama series *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (CTV, 2001- present). Both collections also feature essays that map a history of teen television programming from the late 1940s onwards (Martin, 2008; Osgerby, 2004). Bill Osgerby's essay is particularly insightful. He is one of the few scholars to look at US and UK texts alongside each other, tracing their different national histories of teen programming. I discuss his work in more detail in Chapter 8 when I look exclusively at British teen drama series, indicating how the specific history of youth programming in the UK has affected the discursive construction of the teenager and teenage life in *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*. Here, I also draw on Karen Lury's (2001) analysis of British youth programming between 1987 and 1995. Although Lury focuses primarily on music and magazine formats rather than dramas, the complex connections she makes between viewing sensibilities, generation and television aesthetics remain broadly applicable to contemporary British teen dramas and are useful for working through the discursive construction of the teenager in this specific national context.

Despite these advantages, there are problems in approaching genre in such a flexible and open manner. While Mittell argues that to try and draw boundaries around genres is a 'critical dead-end', at the same time, to take too fluid an approach leads to slipperiness and runs the risk of losing a grip on what is being studied (2004: 11). For example, the authors of both anthologies point out that the content of teen programming does not determine its audience, arguing that both pre-teen and adults watch these programmes as well as teens. As such, Davis and Dickinson's book includes an essay on a children's sci-fi programme (Rutherford, 2004) while Ross and Stein include an essay on the adult drama series, *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-2005) (Brickman, 2008). Like teen drama series, both of these programmes feature prominent teenage characters and engage with teenage themes. They are also both dramas and contain serial elements. Yet, as I argue throughout this thesis, teen drama series feature distinctive elements that differentiate them from children's and adult drama series, particularly in their handling of narratives about teenage sexuality and sexual violence. *Six Feet Under* does contain teenage sexual narratives, but these are not the main focus of the series in the way that they are in programmes like *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl*.

Defining teen drama series by the age of characters and by particular themes can also lead to a critical conflation of these programmes with teen cinema.⁷ Timothy Shary (2002) and Steve Neale (2000) both define the cinematic teen genre predominantly by the centrality of teenage characters. Scholarship on a distinct cinematic teen genre is much more prevalent than work on teen television, with several books (Bernstein, 1997; Lewis, 1992; Shary, 2002, 2005; Tropiano, 2006), articles (Shary, 1997) and subsections in books on film genre (Neale, 2000) devoted exclusively to identifying shared textual markers across teen films. However, like the work on teen television dramas, this criticism strongly emphasises the generic hybridity of teen films, with Shary (2002) separating the chapters in his book according to subgeneric categories such as 'Youth in School' and 'The Youth Horror Film'.

Teenage characters and themes certainly transcend formats, genres and mediums, as Moseley (2002) illuminates in her essay which traces the representation of female teenage witchcraft and magic across teen films, sitcoms and drama series from 1964 onwards. However, while she highlights interesting thematic parallels across these texts,

⁷ Roz Kaveney's (2006) *Teen Dreams* provides an example of this conflation. In her book she pays little attention to medium specificity, alternating between discussions of teen films and television drama series. She also displays a strong bias towards teen film and when she does include limited descriptions of teen dramas it is solely to consider the influence of teen film on these programmes, examining cinematic references and crossover stardom. Further, the book's front cover exclusively features still filmic images and the index page is entitled 'Index of Films', subsuming television programmes under this heading.

her broad view of genre means that issues of format and medium specificity become obscured. In particular, this approach is ill-suited to account for the serial elements of teen drama series. She discusses the recurring trope of the female teenage make-over in these texts, tracing it across 1980s teen films such as *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986) and *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985) to teen sitcoms such as *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (ABC/The WB, 1996- 2003) and contemporary teen drama series, such as *Dawson's Creek*. She asserts that, 'At the heart of the teen film and television show, then, is the glamorous makeover of the central female character, a mechanism through which appropriate feminine identities are constructed and reinforced' (2002: 406). Yet, while the makeover of tomboy, Joey in *Dawson's Creek* does function to reinforce appropriate feminine identities - she is 'rewarded' for her efforts by gaining the attention of her love interest, Dawson - the storyline holds a vastly different degree of narrative weight than the films Moseley discusses. In *Pretty in Pink*, for example, the heroine's 'makeover' occurs at the climax of the film and is portrayed as a significant moment in her sense of personal identity, while in *Dawson's Creek*, Joey's makeover occurs in the first season and is, thus, diluted by the series' subsequent five seasons. Further, Moseley's account does not allow for the ambiguities inherent in long-running series. Joey may gain Dawson's interest in this episode, but she quickly rejects him and returns to being a tomboy.

This example reinforces Mittell's argument that, 'importing genre theories from other media into television studies cannot address key specificities of the television medium, which are formative of the genre categories we may wish to analyze' (2004: 1-2). It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that Ross and Stein draw so heavily on Mittell in formulating their own conception of the teen television genre. Despite setting out to challenge preconceptions of what this genre constitutes, almost all of the essays in their book focus on teen *drama series* with no acknowledgement of this bias. Similarly, despite entitling their book *Teen TV*, in their introduction Davis and Dickinson express the intention of the volume to 'unravel [the] recurrent characteristics of teen *dramas*' (my emphasis), neglecting to make a distinction between the dramatic format of particular teen programmes and broader teen television, which could encompass diverse formats from documentaries to quiz shows (2004: 1). From the outset, they use an example from *Dawson's Creek* as indicative of teen television more widely, relating the selected sequence to other US teen drama series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *My So-Called Life* and *Smallville* (2004: 1).

This equation of teen television with teen drama series is troubling in anthologies which profess a desire and need to take teen television seriously and which identify a lack of rigor in existing teen television scholarship. This equation is perhaps most prevalent in

the section entitled 'Genre' in Davis and Dickinson's book, in which one would expect to find work that is particularly careful and thorough in its definitions of teen television. All four of the essays comprising this section focus exclusively on teen drama series, yet pay little attention to the format of these texts. This critical neglect is particularly apparent in the essay by Hills (2004) on the quality and cult status of *Dawson's Creek*. Hills never once mentions the dramatic format of the series despite the fact that, I would argue, it is inextricably linked to the series' perception as 'quality'. It is difficult to imagine a similar argument being made regarding the 'quality' status of a teen quiz show.

In television criticism of teen dramas, teen drama is not only conceptualised as synonymous with teen television, but also with teen series. All of the teen dramas discussed in the two anthologies, as well as most of those discussed in teen television criticism more broadly, contain serial elements and yet, with few exceptions, attention is rarely paid to these programmes' narrative organisation. The tendency to overlook these issues of format reflects a wider marginalisation of considerations of medium specificity in this work. Scholarship on teen television drama series frequently favours broad episode synopses, characterisation or extracts of dialogue over other televisual and aural aspects of the text, such as the camerawork, soundtrack and scheduling. This marginalisation can be partially explained by the increasingly interdisciplinary context of television studies more widely. Three of the contributors to Davis and Dickinson's book are English lecturers and thus, television is not their main concern (Bavidge, 2004; Badmington, 2004; Rutherford, 2004). This interdisciplinary context is not unique to criticism of teen dramas, but to popular television studies more widely. The recent series of books on individual television programmes, entitled *Reading Contemporary Television*, reflect this cross disciplinary focus, featuring contributors from diverse fields of study including political science, languages and law. Whilst this can lead to interesting insights, as some of the most popular academic writing on contemporary television, it does encourage a worrying neglect of medium specificity. Additionally, this populist television scholarship is often underpinned by an assumption that 'good television' (television the scholar likes) is the only legitimate object of study. It is notable that the contributors to the *Reading Desperate Housewives* book, for example, are overwhelmingly fans of the series (Akass and McCabe, 2006). As I explore in the following section, this emphasis on viewing pleasure can mean that issues such as sexual violence are under-explored.

The lack of attention paid to issues of genre in scholarship of teen drama series is also troubling, reflecting a critical reluctance to judge these programmes on their own merits. Yet, to acknowledge that particular programmes are part of a wider teen drama series genre does not necessarily have to lessen their appeal. Rather, by considering issues

of genre, more nuanced analyses of teen drama series, that do not focus exclusively on examples of US, 'quality' texts with cross-over adult appeal, can ensue. As Jason Jacobs argues, 'It is necessary to think about different aspirations of different kinds of television, which ultimately requires thinking less about "television" and more about particular genres and programmes' (2001: 430). Although I am a fan of many teen drama series, I am not interested here in elevating certain programmes as examples of 'quality' texts. Instead, I am interested in opening up a generic space where I can examine representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence on the teen drama series' own terms.

The Representational Politics of Teen Drama Series

One of the main ways that teen television scholars justify elevating particular programmes as 'quality' texts that are worthy of critical attention is on the basis of their representational politics. Kate Douglas and Kelly McWilliam label Australian teen series *Heartbreak High* (Network Ten/ABC, 1994-1999) an example of a 'quality teen television drama' implicitly in relation to the series' non stereotypical representations of multicultural teenaged identities (2004: 151). Conversely, Ross expresses concern that *Felicity* is critically acclaimed due to its marginalisation of representations of race (2004: 142). These examples reflect the tendency of teen television scholarship more widely to either condemn dramas for representing race, sexuality, gender, nationality and/or class in a stereotypical and, thus, negative manner or to champion texts for transgressing representational clichés.⁸

Davis explores this tendency towards polemical criticism of the positive/negative representational politics of teen series further, arguing that what constitutes a 'positive' representation is highly contentious (2004: 134). He notes that the critical demand for 'positive' images in teen dramas is bound to the assumption that children and teenagers are more susceptible to televisual imagery than adults. However, despite his awareness of the flaws of this argument, Davis maintains that if the media *can* influence viewers' opinions and behaviours, then the educative potential of representation in the teen series should not be ignored. In particular, he examines representations of queer teens in *Party of Five*, *Dawson's Creek* and *My So-Called Life*, arguing that these depictions may provide points of identification for queer teenage viewers, as well as promote tolerance and understanding in heterosexual viewers. He expands that in the context of a scarcity of televisual representations of queer teens, these depictions take on added significance creating an even greater need to avoid stereotyping.

⁸ Further examples would include much of the feminist work on *Buffy* which tends to praise or condemn the programme for its portrayals of femininity and feminist ideologies.

Critical concerns about whether individual representations in teen series are progressive or regressive, then, are inextricably bound to concerns about viewer identification and specifically, the educational impact that these images may have on teenage viewers' behaviours, attitudes and expectations. This emphasis on the impact of images on viewers is particularly prevalent in feminist work on young girls. Sarah Projansky and Leah Vande Berg (2000) consider the kinds of identities offered to young female viewers by *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* while E. Graham McKinley (1997) looks exclusively at young female viewers when conducting her audience research of *Beverly Hills*. In recent years there has been a growing body of feminist work on male teenage identification with male characters (Feasey, 2008; Turnbull, 2008; Banks, 2004). However, even then, this work frequently relates these findings to female viewers. For example, Miranda J. Banks, whose essay examines representations of teenage masculinity in *Smallville* and *Roswell*, argues that the sensitivity and emotional strength manifest in the central teenage male characters of these series makes them 'the ideal mate for a budding young feminist' (2004: 26).

While I agree with Davis that media representations can potentially influence both young *and* adult viewers' opinions and behaviours, work on teenage viewer identification tends to be overly simplistic, failing to take into account the complex ways in which these viewers make meaning and take pleasure from texts and neglecting to consider cross-gender identification.⁹ Furthermore, the emphasis on teenage female identification at the expense of equivalent considerations of teenage male identification is highly problematic as it replicates traditional stereotypes of females being passive in contrast to active males. The predominant interest in young female viewers implies that these viewers are in need of guidance on how and what they should be watching, while the critical silence on young male viewers suggests that they are less vulnerable. The small body of audience research on teenage viewers complicates and challenges these notions of viewer identification, revealing that, far from watching passively, this audience is often actively engaging with these programmes (Driver, 2007; Turnbull, 2008; Brooker, 2001; McKinley, 1997). Moreover, as Turnbull (2008) notes, with their ensemble casts, teen drama series offer the opportunity for viewers to oscillate between several viewing positions, including those that cross gender or generational boundaries. Will Brooker further problematises this overly

⁹ In her analysis of the crossover teen stardom of Sarah Michelle Gellar, Susan Murray (2007) equates female teenage identification with characters of the same gender and age, thereby neglecting to consider cross-generational or cross-gender identification. Sheryl Vint (2002), in her analysis of the relationship between Buffy and Gellar, also looks exclusively at how young female viewers may identify with each of these figures, at the expense of considerations of young male viewers' identification with the show.

simplistic sense of viewer identification in his comparative research into teenage viewers of *Dawson's Creek* in British and US contexts, illustrating that nationality, socioeconomic circumstances, class, gender and race had significant roles to play in how these viewers engaged with the text (2001: 456- 72).

Not only are the multiplicities of viewing positions overlooked in this positive/negative scholarship, but considerations of genre too. The dichotomous nature of this criticism is arguably ill-suited to apply to a genre in which the vulnerability and associated fallibility of the teenage characters is a prominent theme. It is worth noting, however, that there are some teen television scholars who do consider the intersection of genre when examining teenage representations in teen drama series and, through doing so, produce very insightful and nuanced analyses. For example, Rebecca Feasey (2008) and Banks (2004), both of whom consider the representation of masculinity through the male protagonists of *Smallville* and *Roswell*, pay close attention to these series' teen/supernatural generic hybridity, exploring how, in this particular context, male teenage aliens operate as metaphors for otherness. They argue that this alien motif allows for a construction of masculinity that differs from the mainstream. Both scholars make powerful analogies between these characters' supernatural strength and their sexual development, arguments that I draw on in Chapter 5 when I look at *Smallville* in more depth.

It is also useful to mention Allison McCracken's (2007) essay on representations of masculinity in *Buffy* here, which looks specifically at the figure of Angel and, again, pays close attention to issues of generic as well as medium specificity. McCracken departs from Banks and Feasey's exclusive focus on male characters, however, to consider broader gender relations. Indeed, while Banks and Feasey make insightful connections between the supernatural hybridity of particular texts and their representation of masculinity and male sexuality, because they look only at the male protagonists of these programmes, their work is ill-suited to say anything broader about how this difference affects the series' portrayals of teenage sexual relationships or sexual violence. This omission is perhaps surprising in relation to *Smallville*, which as I shall discuss further in Chapter 5, features the most sexual violence narratives of all the series I have looked at. McCracken, in contrast, argues that Angel is only meaningful in his relation to other characters, particularly his love interest, Buffy, and she traces the series' gender subversion and revision of the horror genre through their sexual relationship. I explore McCracken's arguments further in the following section on feminist television scholarship and in Chapters 4 and 7, but for now, I want to point out that by situating Angel in relation to Buffy, she is able to move away from considering whether he constitutes a positive or negative image to think more widely

about how he functions in this specific context as well as about representations of gendered sexuality and sexual violence.

Michelle Byers' (1998) essay on gender, sexuality and desire in *My So-Called Life* provides a precedent to McCracken and, in some ways, she takes her analysis further. Instead of focusing on one character and their sexual relationships, she examines the representation of sexuality across the whole teenage cast and nineteen-episode series. Byers uses a structural approach to analyse sexual representations in *My So-Called Life* as a means to move beyond her own fandom of the series and engage with it more critically and rigorously. By doing so, she finds that she is able to expose an underlying ideological conservatism beneath the surface of a seemingly progressive series. I draw on and develop Byers' model for analysing sexual representations across serial structures in Chapter 4, when I provide an overview of sexual narratives across the fourteen series.

Positioning representations of sexuality in relation to narrative and series' structures is more common in television scholarship of homosexual representations. Davis (2004), for example, situates his analysis of gay characters in teen drama series in relation to narrative and series' structures as well as broader generic frameworks, considering representational and structural patterns across a number of teen drama series. Further, Anna McCarthy (2003) and Dennis Allen (1995) both situate their analyses of homosexual television characters in relation to narrative and serial forms. This work is useful to consider in the following section on the depiction of social issue storylines across the teen drama genre.

Teen Television Criticism of Social Issue Storylines

Several critics of teen drama series cite a concern with social issues, such as sex and sexuality, drug and alcohol use, as a defining feature of the genre (Moseley, 2001; Davis and Dickinson, 2004; McKinley, 1997; Douglas and McWilliam, 2004; Osgerby, 2004). Like the work on representation, the educative potential of teen television dramas in responsibly presenting these issues to teenage viewers is a recurring concern in this criticism. Davis argues that 'the teen series seems to embody great promise for bringing to the screen lives, desires and issues that are often ignored, stymied or cursorily treated by television (and other media)' (2004: 131). He explains that the sheer length of series offers opportunities for the development of characterisation and the detailed exploration of social issue storylines.

It is significant that Davis attributes the teen dramas' potential for representing complex issues to its serial structure here. A common criticism of the genre is its relegation

of social issues to one-off ‘very special’ episodes (Wilcox, 1999). For example, McKinley observes that the plots of *Beverly Hills* resolve a central social issue that affects teens in each episode, thus enabling an upbeat ending to encourage viewers to return the following week (1997: 24). Citing Aaron Spelling, the series’ producer, she explains that the programme has a didactic aim, explicitly attempting to educate young adult viewers about social issues that have resonance with their lives (1997: 24). However, McKinley is pessimistic about the series’ potential for facilitating critical discourse with these self-contained issue-led episodes, arguing that although *Beverly Hills* emphasises tolerance, it ‘never probes issues or interrogates mainstream values in sufficient depth to yield fresh insights’ (1997: 26). Her audience research reveals that viewers rarely discussed these issues in any detail after the episode’s resolution.

Moreover, when considering the genre’s treatment of social issues, specifically ‘coming out’ narratives, Davis observes that far from dealing with ‘coming out’ narratives in complexity, teen dramas have a tendency to relegate these storylines to one-off episodes and to treat the disclosure of homosexuality as the (re)solution to the gay character’s ‘problem’ (2004: 133). I look at this narrative and representational pattern further in Chapter 6, when I focus on homophobic abuse narratives. This finding resonates with wider work on televisual depictions of homosexuality, which points to the incompatibility between these representations and serial form (Allen, 1995; Dow, 2001; Kennedy, 1994; McCarthy, 2003; Davis, 2004). As McCarthy explains, queerness poses a problem for television’s representational politics, pointing to ‘the difficulty of making same-sex desire uneventful, serial, every day’ (2003: 97). She argues that the serial structure of fictional television narratives echoes the normative developmental narrative of sexuality, with heterosexual characters’ romantic relationships providing metanarratives across series (2003: 93). As such, homosexual characters tend to be pushed to the side-lines and relegated to specific storylines directly concerning homosexuality and/or homophobia. I explore this further in Chapter 4, when I trace the teen drama series’ dominant sexual narratives.

In turn, several scholars make claims for particular series’ exceptionality on the basis that they avoid isolated ‘special’ issue-led episodes (Bavidge, 2004; Wilcox, 1999; Byers, 1998; Bolte, 2008). Byers explains, in relation to *My So-Called Life*, that, ‘the problem of [racial, class, sexual, ethnic, ability] difference is not just depicted as a “crisis of the week”, not simply as a topical idea that disappears with the guest stars who enact it, but as an integral part of the diegesis’ (2007: 30). Her use of the terms ‘not just’ and ‘not simply’ imply that episodic issue-led narratives present complicated issues in overly simplistic and insufficient terms. Bolte makes this value judgment explicit, arguing in

relation to *Veronica Mars* that, ‘no good can come from a cursory portrayal of deep and difficult issues’ (2008: 108). Notably, these scholars all isolate female-fronted teen drama series as offering particularly conducive representational contexts for exploring social issues in complexity. Chapter 7 will explore this claim further.

These debates about the potentials and limitations of the teen drama series at depicting social issues reveal one of the main tensions of this genre. As Davis and Dickinson explain, makers of teen programming often feel a responsibility to educate young viewers about relevant issues (2004: 3). Yet, at the same time, this programming has a commercial imperative to entertain and appeal to these consumers. Thus, ‘the difficulty for these programmes lies in presenting views on such themes without preaching to or alienating teens, without destroying the sense that these are “their” shows’ (Davis and Dickinson, 2004: 3). They explain that teen television programming can be highly contradictory in these themes, making about-turns on major narrative issues in the face of market forces (4).¹⁰ This tension raises the question of how social issue storylines concerning sexuality and sexual violence will be framed in the context of teen drama series. If Davis and Dickinson are correct in their assertion that teen programming treats social issues in a hegemonic manner, it will be interesting to explore whether feminist discourses on sexual violence that challenge the patriarchal status quo will be incorporated into the genre’s sexual violence narratives.

Feminist Television Scholarship

This project will examine representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence in teen drama series from a feminist perspective and thus, this second section of the chapter will explore feminist television scholarship in more detail. As Brunsdon (1997) notes, women are central to this work. She identifies four main categories of feminist television scholarship: female audience research; content analyses of onscreen representations of women; women working in the television industry; and textual studies of programmes that are for and about women. It is this textual feminist criticism that this section will focus on, as this approach most closely resembles my own. I will begin by situating feminist analyses of teen drama series in relation to broader feminist television scholarship on issues of representation. Following on from this, I will consider work specifically on screen representations of sexuality and sexual violence.

¹⁰ Douglas and McWilliam similarly observe that later seasons of *Heartbreak High* began disregarding considerations of social issues in response to market pressure (2004: 156).

Feminist Television Criticism on Representation

Although Brunsdon made this distinction between different kinds of feminist criticism over a decade ago, feminist textual analyses of programmes that are for and about women prevail. Indicating this continued concern, the latest edition of *Feminist Television Criticism* (2008), which is edited by Brunsdon along with Lynn Spigel, is separated into two sections, the first of which is entitled 'Programmes and Heroines'. In turn, feminist work on teen drama series has focused almost exclusively on the heroines of female-fronted texts such as *My So-Called Life* (Byers, 1998; Murray, 2007), *Buffy* (Wilcox, 1999; Vint, 2002; Pender, 2002; Bavidge, 2004) and *Veronica Mars* (Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008).

This scholarship has tended to focus quite narrowly on the feminist credentials of these female characters. Feminism and femininity are often viewed as mutually exclusive in this work and, thus, the heroine is typically categorised as a positive or negative role model according to whether she subverts (Karras, 2002; Coward, 2006) or conforms to feminine stereotypes (Akass, 2006; Badley, 1999). Ultimately, the central question of this work becomes: is this female character a good or a bad feminist?; a question which is often answered by analysing the character's appearance or costume (Pender, 2002).

This role model approach, like the teen television work on representation, is often justified by the potential impact that these images may have on young, supposedly vulnerable, female viewers. However, this tendency of the feminist scholar to designate appropriate images for the 'ordinary' female actually has a much longer and less age-specific history. It harks back to second-wave feminist television scholarship of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which, leading on from debates over onscreen depictions of women in feminist film criticism, was centrally concerned with highlighting the multiple ways in which mainstream media perpetuates sexist ideologies (Brunsdon, 1997: 30). Assuming female viewers to be passive and thus, highly susceptible to televisual imagery, these scholars conceived of a direct correlation between representation and social effects. Using content analysis, they examined female televisual representations, arguing that onscreen females were relegated to the stereotypical and demeaning roles of either housewife and mother or sex object (for examples, see Butcher et al, 1974; Tuchman et al, 1978; Cassata and Skill, 1983; Matelski, 1988). As a result of their findings, they called for more realistic representations, but as Brunsdon explains, 'arguing for more realistic images is always an argument for "your" version of reality' (quoted in van Zoonen, 1994: 4). Therefore, in demanding greater realism, these early feminist scholars were paradoxically calling for

more 'positive' (read feminist) representations, in turn creating a sense of dis-identity between the feminist academic and ordinary female viewer with the former presuming the authority to designate the correct images and ways of seeing for the latter (Hollows and Moseley, 2006).

Although later feminist scholarship has criticised this earlier work for neglecting to take into account the complex and active ways in which viewers make meaning and take pleasure from texts, the emphasis on the representation of femininity as well as the sense of dis-identity between the academic and viewer persists. As Brunsdon and Spigel note, the tendency of the feminist to presume that she knows how other women should interpret texts is present in contemporary feminist television criticism, which is often characterised by a 'pedagogic advice mode' (2008: 11). The use of the term 'role model' in contemporary feminist analysis of individual female television characters explicitly connotes this 'advice mode'.

As there is no common consensus on what a feminist identity entails, the persistent emphasis of contemporary feminist television criticism on the feminist credentials of individual female television characters can seem rather pointless and circuitous. An array of different feminisms exist and terms such as 'post-' and 'third-wave' feminism can be interpreted in vastly different ways depending on particular scholars' political beliefs. While some criticise the term 'post-feminism' for implying that the goals of feminism have already been achieved (Boyle, 2005b: 31; Projansky, 2001), others view the term more positively, as a useful descriptor for recent changes in the televisual representation of women (Lotz, 2001: 106). 'Post-feminism' has also become synonymous at times with 'popular feminism', thus complicating matters further. A similar lack of agreement marks the term 'third-wave feminism', with some writers equating the movement's emphases with those of post-feminism (Hollows and Moseley, 2006: 13) and others seeing it as a continuation, rather than a break from, second-wave politics (Karras, 2002). As a result of this confusion, all terms now require qualifiers to stabilise their meanings and there are many recent essays that interrogate critical terms (Boyle, 2005b; Brunsdon, 2006; Lotz, 2001; McRobbie, 2004).

Generational difference is central to these debates (Modleski, 1999). Although there is no common agreement on what post- or third-wave feminism entails, they share a similar differentiation from second-wave feminism. Brunsdon explains that second-wave feminism often becomes the other of post-feminist women, who falsely demonise this earlier generation for repressing all sense of difference between women and for being excessively hostile (2006: 43). Yet, paradoxically, the relentless focus of post-feminist scholars on individual, white, heterosexual, middle-class female television characters

means that they are also unable to say anything useful about difference (Boyle, 2005b: 37). In her anthology on third-wave feminism and television, Merri Lisa Johnson similarly invokes this idea of the second-wave generation as essentialist and humourless, positing a version of second-wave feminism that is characterised by self-restraint and ‘flawless self-abnegation’, in contrast to a version of third-wave feminism that is characterised by self-indulgence and autonomous pleasure (2007: 8). As Boyle explains, ‘much recent feminist media studies presents a feminism at war with itself and the political relevance of feminism is in danger of being lost’ (2005b: 38). Feminism never has been nor should be a monolithic entity, yet the intricate nature of contemporary debates over the uses of terms risks obscuring the movement’s broader, political goals which, to me, are working towards eradicating sexism and gendered inequality. By becoming entangled in endless and ultimately unanswerable debates, these goals become lost.

Despite these differences in meaning, in discussions of the progressive television heroine the same prized traits recur. Independence is perhaps the most celebrated of all. Yet, this points to one of the central problems of this positive/negative analysis; it is too rigid to account for generic specificity. Age is less carefully attended to than gender in this work. Reflecting this, Levine compares Buffy to adult heroines such as Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore) in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977) and Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart) without any acknowledgement that she is over a decade younger than these women (2007: 168).

Indeed, this feminist critical celebration of independence is particularly problematic in relation to teen drama series, in which the age-related vulnerability of teenage characters is a prominent generic theme. On the one hand, the female protagonists of these series are certainly depicted as highly independent, physically and/or mentally strong, witty and perceptive. They drive the narrative forwards and control the gaze. On the other hand, at least in early seasons, they depend upon their parents for food, shelter and money and their vulnerability is a prominent generic theme. Bavidge expands on this tension between the independence of the teenage heroine, prized by feminist scholars, and their age-related vulnerability, stressed in the series themselves, arguing that the female adolescent heroine in literature and on television is both a source of optimism and ‘a potential victim, willing or otherwise, of the projections or temptations of the corrupt adult world’ (2004: 46).

Bavidge is not alone in acknowledging the ambiguities inherent in the representation of female teenage television characters. Many other feminist television scholars also reject the rigidity of the positive/negative role model approach and instead interrogate the complexities in female-fronted teen series’ representation of feminism and femininity (Moseley, 2002; Pender, 2002; Bavidge, 2004; Banet-Weiser, 2004; Braun,

2007). In order to do so, these scholars frequently draw on post-feminist discourses to understand these mainstream texts' representation of feminism, or more specifically, the relationship between the heroine's femininity and feminist power (Brunsdon, 1997: 81-102). As Boyle explains, 'it is precisely this combination of traditional femininity with the gains of second-wave feminism that many cultural critics - both within and outside of the academy - have labeled post-feminist' (2005a: 177).

As several of these scholars argue, these programmes incorporate the tensions and contradictions between femininity and feminism as part of their narrative logic and, in doing so, foreground the performative nature of gender identity and, specifically, girlhood (Pender, 2002; Bavidge, 2004; Banet-Weiser, 2004; Braun, 2007). There is a consensus across this work that these programmes are, therefore, particularly well-suited to critique issues of gendered inequality. However, despite this consensus, at the centre of these debates remains a persistent emphasis on the white, middle-class heroine, making the work ill-suited to say anything broader about difference, gender relations and feminist issues such as sexual violence. In relation to feminist media studies more broadly, Boyle notes that this critical focus on deconstructing female characters means that issues of men, masculinity and violence remain unexplored (2005b: 38). This thesis will address this contemporary critical neglect by examining representations of gender and sexuality more widely and relating these to representations of sexual violence.

Feminist Television Criticism of Representations of Sexuality

The lack of feminist scholarship on representations of men and masculinity extends to work on sexuality, which tends to focus only on female sexual representations. When male sexuality is discussed, it is more commonly from a queer, rather than a feminist, critical perspective, tending to emphasise representations of homosexuality (Davis, 2004; Battis, 2007). The feminist critical silence on the representation of male heterosexuality results in a danger of these depictions becoming normalised and thus, remaining unexplored. As Anthony Easthope asserts, 'Masculinity tries to stay invisible by passing itself off as normal and universal [...] Despite all that has been written in the past 20 years on femininity and feminism, masculinity has remained pretty well concealed, this has always been its ruse to hold on to power' (1986: 1). Notably, Easthope made this argument over two decades ago and since then a critical literature on men and masculinity has emerged.¹¹ Nevertheless, this work has tended to emphasise film, men's magazines and

¹¹ For examples, see Lehman, 2001; Benwell, 2003; Kimmel, 2004; Bruzzi, 2005; Baker, 2006; Chopra-Gant, 2006.

popular culture more widely rather than television and *feminist* television scholarship continues to emphasise representations of women and femininity. This thesis will readdress this issue, inserting men and masculinity back into feminist television scholarship by examining gender relations between characters and a range of sexual identities.

Contemporary feminist criticism of female sexual representations in many ways replicates the role model emphasis of feminist analyses of central female television characters, by categorising these representations as positive or negative. The same characters and texts that are widely debated in role model research recur in this work, including *Sex and the City*, *Buffy* and *Ally McBeal*, alongside texts such as *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009) and *Ellen* (ABC, 1994-1998), which prominently feature lesbian characters. Also in line with feminist role model criticism, there is an implicit or explicit concern in this work with the effect of the image on the audience, particularly young viewers, hence the call for 'positive' representations (Dow, 2001; Johnson, 2007).

Akin to the debate regarding what a feminist identity entails, it is unclear what a 'positive' image of female hetero- or homosexuality should look like. In their analysis of lesbian representations in *The L Word*, Susan J. Wolfe and Lee Ann Roripaugh outline several contradictory feminist responses to the drama, arguing that these reactions

reveal a consistent sense of anxiety about lesbian representation: assimilationist visibility versus marginalised invisibility, identitarian 'authenticity' versus Revlon revolution 'passing', second-wave versus third-wave feminism, lesbianism versus post-lesbianism, and policing of commodified mainstream image making versus the policing of negative stereotypes (2006: 212).

The lack of consensus over what constitutes a positive representation of sexuality, like the debate over the feminist credentials of female television characters, is related to the multiplicity of feminisms that exist. All of the essays in Johnson's (2007) anthology consider issues of sexuality in relation to third-wave politics, while Jane Arthurs (2003) frames an interrogation of the sexuality of the four central female characters in *Sex and the City* through the lens of post-feminist and post-modern culture. Both third-wave and post-feminisms embrace female sexual autonomy and pleasure, yet this emphasis risks obscuring the pervasiveness of sexual gendered inequality. Rarely does post- or third-wave feminist criticism engage with televisual representations of sexual violence. There are a couple of essays in Johnson's (2007) anthology which are an exception to this rule, with Johnson herself examining representations of violence in *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) and Lara Stemple considering representations of male rape in *Oz* (HBO, 1997-2003), but like the rest of the contributions to this anthology and in line with third-wave feminist ideology in general, these essays are primarily concerned with the viewing

enjoyment of the individual author. This emphasis of feminist scholars on television they like is not new. Almost two decades ago, Tania Modleski argued that feminist media criticism is in danger of becoming overly self-involved, ‘based on an unspoken syllogism that goes something like this: “I like *Dallas*; I am a feminist; *Dallas* must have progressive potential”’ (1991: 45). While it can be interesting and informative to interrogate one’s own pleasure in watching television, there is a danger of this work becoming overly insular if it fails to connect these personal analyses with wider feminist concerns about the relationship between sexuality, gender and power.

Feminist Analysis of Onscreen Representations of Sexual Violence

The rejection of the so-called ‘victimising’ tendency of second-wave feminist criticism by many post- and third-wave feminist critics in favour of an emphasis on women’s sexual autonomy and pleasure means that televisual representations of sexual violence remain largely unexplored (Boyle, 2005b: 40). However, in recent years a small body of feminist work that touches upon the representation of sexual violence in teen drama series has emerged (Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008; McCracken, 2007). Reflecting the tendency of feminist (and teen) television scholarship more widely, these authors all focus on female-fronted texts, specifically *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*, and use their inclusion of sexual violence as evidence of these texts’ ‘specialness’ (see Bolte, 2008: 93-113 for an example).

In these discussions, the sexual nature of this violence is often overlooked. When discussing a *Buffy* episode in which Xander and his cruel peers are possessed by hyena spirits and begin bullying other students (106 ‘The Pack’), Bolte concludes that the episode’s ‘obvious message’ is that the ‘in-crowd can be cruel’ (2008: 102). While she is not incorrect in this interpretation and her analysis is thorough, it is notable that she omits a discussion of the *sexually* violent aspects of Xander’s behaviour. In this episode, Xander physically pins Buffy to the floor, straddles her and proceeds to caress her face while verbally sexually goading her.

McCracken is unusual in that she situates her analysis of sexual violence narratives in relation to representations of gendered sexuality (specifically masculinity) in *Buffy*, looking at both male and female characters and paying close attention to the intersection of genre and medium specificity with these narratives. However, like Bolte and Braithwaite (and reflecting teen television scholarship more widely), McCracken uses her detailed analysis of *Buffy* in the service of arguing for the series’ progressiveness and elevating it

above other teen dramas (2007: 139). She invokes ‘boy soaps’ such as *The O.C.* and *Smallville* as the ‘bad’ other to *Buffy*, making sweeping generalisations about their representations of female characters and female sexuality. In this way, while her readings of sexual representations and sexual violence narratives are insightful, by focusing on how unique *Buffy* is, she rather overstates her case. As I argue in Chapter 7, structural analysis of sexual violence across a number of female-fronted series reveals striking patterns that begin to complicate the prevailing critical view of *Buffy* as different from all other generic texts.

Although they do not focus on teen drama series, the book-length studies by Lisa M. Cuklanz (2000), Sujata Moorti (2002) and Sarah Projansky (2001) provide useful precedents when considering representational patterns of sexual violence across a number of texts. Each of these books deals with different aspects of on-screen rape narratives; a central concern of Cuklanz’s book is the relationship between the mass medium of television and the depiction of social issues, while Moorti is primarily interested in the intersection of race and gender in televisual representations of rape across several different genres. Projansky considers both film and television representations of rape, examining their relationship to post-feminist ideology.

Although each author has different concerns when looking at onscreen representations of rape, similar findings emerge. All three authors apply textual analysis across a range of representations of rape in order to identify central recurring trends in these depictions and examine the potentials and limitations of these narratives in facilitating a feminist discourse on male sexual violence against women. Each author is similarly sceptical of the ability of mainstream news coverage of rape cases to enable feminist understandings of sexual violence. In an earlier study, Cuklanz (1996) analyses news coverage of prominent rape cases, discovering that fictional representations of the same cases were often better at engaging with feminist discourses (2000: 15). All three authors also note the tendency of these fictional representations to foreground female experiences of sexual violence and its aftermath, condemn the rapist and challenge rape myths. Furthermore, both Cuklanz and Moorti observe that fictional television genres are often able to offer multiple perspectives on rape through their ensemble casts, thereby potentially dealing with the issue of sexual violence in a more complex manner.

Cuklanz, Moorti and Projansky also observe the limitations of fictional formats in presenting feminist perspectives on violence against women. Moorti notes that, while some feminist definitions of rape are highlighted in these programmes, prime time rape narratives rarely critique the patriarchal social structures that contribute to gendered inequality and violence, but rather recuperate ideal hegemonic masculinity through male

characters that are better feminists than female characters (2002: 114). She observes that female characters in these narratives often espouse patriarchal interpretations of rape, while male characters typically ‘respond with a unified spirit that actively promotes female-centered definitions of rape’ (114). As such, as Moorti observes, these male characters ‘have arrogated to themselves the right to instruct women on feminism and the appropriate responses to sexual assault’ (2002: 114). Similarly, Cuklanz finds that definitions of masculinity remain at the core of these representations (2000: 154). She observes that it is male detectives and professionals who are typically the protagonists of these storylines and, thus, while the aftermath on the female victim may be explored, ultimately masculine responses to rape are privileged (154). Moorti observes a further limitation of these fictional representations in the marginalisation of race in narratives that deal with interracial rape (2002: 118), a trend that Projansky attributes to the overwhelming white focus of post feminism (2001: 94).

Projansky directly relates the limitations of fictional representations of rape to the intersection of post-feminism with these narratives, examining how certain texts use, respond to and challenge post-feminist discourses and also feminist anti-rape discourses (2001: 94). She concludes that, ‘like most post feminist discourses, these rape narratives generally absorb and alter what feminism is, suggesting in the process, that feminism is no longer necessary’ (94). Her book reflects the need for contemporary feminist criticism to qualify terms in order to stabilise their meanings. Not only do the terms ‘second-wave feminism’, ‘post-feminism’ and ‘third-wave feminism’ refer to different ideologies within a broader feminist movement, but Projansky also identifies three different strands of thought within post-feminism, explaining, for example, that television and filmic representations of rape intersect with backlash feminism, anti-feminist post feminism and pro-sex post feminism (2001: 94). Arguably the most confusing of these terms is ‘antifeminist feminist post feminism’, a term that further indicates the increasingly circuitous nature of contemporary feminist criticism, which necessarily invests more in defining different strands of feminism than anything else.

When considering prime time fictional televisual representations of rape, these books focus predominantly on legal and police dramas, arguing that these genres are where the majority of rape narratives take place. Notably the programmes they examine – such as, *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986- 94), *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1982- 88), *21 Jump Street* (Fox, 1987- 1991) – are predominantly episodic in nature and thus, their analyses of rape narratives remain largely divorced from wider series’ structures. This can be problematic as illustrated by Projansky’s examination of a rape narrative in season four of *Beverly Hills*

(2001: 108).¹² In this narrative, Steve, a recurring male character, is accused of rape by Laura, a peripheral female. Projansky uses the episode as an example of a rape storyline that incorporates the victim's point of view, arguing that although Laura later reinterprets the rape as consensual sex, the spectator may not necessarily follow suit (108). In a footnote she adds that she would not want to overemphasise this optimistic reading of the narrative, noting that Steve's position as a central, sympathetic character in contrast to Laura's marginal status complicates matters of identification (2001: 259). Projansky is correct to acknowledge the polysemic interpretations that are enabled by the narrative, but by looking at this episode outside the broader series' context of *Beverly Hills*, she misses another dimension of the narrative that could complicate her reading further. The storyline in question is inextricably connected to an earlier episodic storyline from season two (213 'Halloween'), in which Steve protects central female character, Kelly, after she is almost raped (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5). In season four, Kelly uses this earlier experience to convince the victim that Steve is innocent. In the series, then, rape is presented as the domain of individual 'bad' men who are divorced from the programme's central males. In Kelly's view, because Steve protected her, he could not be a rapist. Thus, the series privileges a particular understanding of rape, one that ultimately subsumes the victim's point of view in favour of Kelly's. A dedicated viewer's knowledge of this earlier storyline will arguably affect how this season four narrative is interpreted.

This example points to the value of situating textual analyses in relation to broader narrative, series' and generic structures in order to develop a fuller understanding. Thus, while my thesis is strongly influenced by this work by Cuklanz, Moorti and Projansky, it will also develop upon their research by *contextualising* analyses of sexual violence. Judith Mayne's (1988) essay on *L.A. Law* provides a useful precedent here. Paying close attention to the show's multi-episodic format, interweaving storylines and ensemble cast, she considers how feminist issues, such as sexual violence, are given narrative shape and definition within the series as a whole. While Mayne, like Cuklanz, Projansky and Moorti, also predominantly looks at episodic storylines, she situates her discussion in relation wider series' structures and, in particular, considers how overlapping narratives can alter the ways in which a narrative on rape is interpreted. This approach enables her to identify inconsistencies and ambiguities inherent in long-running series and is particularly useful

¹² *Beverly Hills* is the only teen drama series examined in this work. This neglect can be partially explained by the time period of these studies. Cuklanz considers US prime-time rape narratives between 1979 and 1990, while Moorti analyses representations of rape on US free-view television between 1989 and 1993. In contrast, as aforementioned, teen drama series did not flourish until after 1990. Further, the focus on heterosexual rape in these studies excludes many teen dramas that do not feature fully realised rape narratives.

for this thesis as it provides a way of thinking and writing about the programme as a television *series* as well as examining the relationship between feminist issues and narrative and series' form.

I will further develop this work by broadening my definition of sexual violence. Mayne, Cuklanz, Moorti and Projansky all examine a specific type of sexual violence in their studies, namely heterosexual rape. While Projansky does include a brief summary of representations of male rape in film and made-for-television movies, she too privileges depictions of the rape of women by men (2001: 104-5). This emphasis on representations of male sexual violence against women can certainly be justified since it is predominately females who are the subjects of rape and predominantly males who are the perpetrators, as reflected in televisual representations. Yet, the definition of rape in the studies by Cuklanz, Moorti and Projansky is fairly narrow and is arguably ill-suited to apply to teen drama series. Although these programmes do contain rape narratives, to look at these alone would risk missing several other narratives that involve other forms of sexual violence, including attempted rape and non-physical forms of sexual abuse, such as stalking or verbal homophobic abuse. While rarer, they also feature both male and female perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. While the feminist attention to onscreen representations of heterosexual rape is both important and necessary, there is also value in considering other forms of sexual violence in order to make connections between a range of abusive behaviours and dominant constructions of gendered sexuality. It is for this reason that I turn to Kelly's (1988) work on sexual violence as a continuum, which I shall explore further in the following section. Indeed, this thesis will broaden definitions of sexual violence, examining representations of rape alongside other forms of sexual abuse within teen drama series and exploring gender relations between characters rather than focusing exclusively on male violence against women.

Feminist Criticism on Teenage Sexuality and Sexual Violence

As my thesis is centrally concerned with the relationship between teenage sexuality and sexual violence from a feminist perspective, I want to conclude this chapter by examining feminist academic work in these areas, which derives predominantly from sociology. I will begin by looking at the dominant debates in feminist work on young peoples' sexuality, including concerns with the impact of media sexual portrayals on teenagers' behaviours and expectations. From here, I move on to explore the dominant

debates of feminist scholarship on teenage sexual violence, before proceeding to consider feminist work on sexual violence more broadly.

Feminist Sociological Work on Young People and Sexuality

Feminist scholarship on teenage sexuality tends to focus on adolescent rather than later teenage sexuality, although rarely do scholars define the age group that their studies are concerned with. The critical emphasis on adolescence rather than later teenage years can be partially explained by the common belief that adolescence is a critical period in the development of sexual values and initiation of sexual behaviours (Moore and Rosenthal, 2006: 2). Believing sexuality to be socially constructed rather than biologically determined, there is a recurring preoccupation in this work with the importance of adolescent sexual education and the role that social institutions play in providing this knowledge and shaping young teenage sexuality (Moore and Rosenthal, 2006: 2). While my own thesis is concerned more broadly with *teenage* rather than younger adolescent sexuality, it is useful to consider this work as the construction of sexuality in early teenage years will have ramifications for later teenage conceptions of sexual identity.

These studies share a central concern with the role of the media, alongside the influence of parents, schools and peers, in providing sexual information for teenagers and in moulding their sexual behaviours, attitudes and expectations (Holland et al, 2004; Lees, 1993; Levy, 2006; Moore and Rosenthal, 2006; Tolman, 2005). This emphasis on the role of the media echoes the aforementioned concerns of feminist and teen television scholarship. However, where this work differs is that instead of looking at one particular programme, it looks at the media more broadly. Ariel Levy (2006) and Deborah L. Tolman (2005), for example, are concerned with mapping broad cultural trends and examining the ways in which these trends then feed into the construction of adolescent females' sexualities. Similarly, Susan Moore and Doreen Rosenthal's study of current trends in adolescent sexuality includes a chapter on youth culture, examining a wide range of media that is directed at young teens (magazines, television, video games) in order to determine the kind of information and messages about 'appropriate' sexual behaviour that these products promote (2006: 114-7). Interviews with young teenagers in this work reveal that media models of sexual behaviour are a central source of their sexual information and education. Janet Holland et al explain that,

In the context of growing public concern about the impact on young people of television depictions of sex, it is ironic that many young men identify television as a source of education about relationships and romance - supplementing their understandings from school sex education as intercourse and reproduction (2004: 67).

In many ways, these findings reinforce the validity of the role model emphasis of much feminist and teen television scholarship, by indicating that there *is* a connection between what young viewers watch and how they then behave. Illustrating this, Sue Lees argues that, ‘in films and videos young men are presented as violent and are encouraged to emulate toughness, coolness, physical strength and sexual prowess’, explaining that these representations, in turn, cause ‘heightened aggressive sexuality and violence’ in young male viewers (1993: 3).

It is notable that Lees, like Holland et al above, focuses on young *male* viewers. In stark contrast with the preoccupation with young female viewers in feminist television scholarship, the emphasis of this research is firmly placed on young male viewers, despite often purporting to be gender-neutral (Boyle, 2005a: 17). Similarly, Moore and Rosenthal primarily examine stereotypical representations of women in the media, yet they use this analysis to consider the kinds of messages that these representations may be sending to young male teens (2006: 115).

The sociological concern about the direct correlation between what teenage males watch and how they then act is particularly prevalent in relation to concerns about pornography. Moore and Rosenthal conceive of a direct connection between the adolescent male consumption of pornographic images and subsequent male aggression, arguing that pornography alters the male consumer’s sense of sexual reality by normalising exploitation and violence against women (2006: 116). Similarly, through their interviews with young people, Holland et al discover that the consumption of pornography is prevalent and normalised amongst young males, who use it as a source of sexual information (2004: 68).¹³ An interview with one teenage girl reveals that her boyfriend expected her to act out pornographic sexual positions, thus implying a relationship between the discourses of pornography and teenage sexual culture (2004: 68). This reflects the findings of Levy (2006) and Tolman (2005), both of whom move away from the focus on young men to consider how media images affect young females. Both conducted interviews with teenage girls regarding their sexual identities and detected an absence of desire, agency and pleasure in the way these girls discussed their sexual experiences. Tolman’s first chapter is entitled ‘It Just Happened’ in response to a recurring phrase these girls used to describe their first experiences of sexual intercourse.

Tolman and Levy attribute this sexual passivity to the depiction of female sexuality in popular culture. As Tolman explains, ‘the media continue to represent the belief that

¹³ In their study on teen dating relationships and aggression, Francine Lavoie et al also find that pornographic material is considered an important way of learning about sexuality by both boys and older girls (2000: 31).

adolescent girls should be sexy for boys and not have their *own* sexual desires' (2005: 7, emphasis original). This resonates with the generalised pessimism about media portrayals of sexuality in broader sociological and psychological work on media effects (Arthurs, 2004: 9). This research tends to begin from the common assumption that there are increasingly more explicit sexual representations on television and that this is necessarily a bad thing, thus ignoring the possibility of positive models of sexual education for young viewers (Buckingham and Bragg, 2004: 9). David Buckingham and Sara Bragg argue that, in these studies the term 'sexual content' is rarely consistently or clearly defined and often no distinctions are made between different types of televisual sexual representations, such as whether they are verbal or visual (2004: 9). Illustrating this pessimism and vagueness of definition, Moore and Rosenthal argue that there are high levels of sexual content in popular television programmes and films and that these texts prioritise casual sex at the expense of commitment and emotion, yet they provide no examples of the texts they are referring to, nor do they define 'sexual content' (2006: 114). Instead, they assert that, 'The messages conveyed by these films and television shows do not provide strong or positive models of healthy sexual expression for men or women, nor do they reflect sensitive, intimate, relationship-based sexuality as a particularly attractive option for men' (2006: 115). It is notable that they emphasise normative sexual behaviour here. Their reading rests on the problematic assumption that monogamy is a positive expression of sexuality and that casual sex is not.

It is significant to note that both the studies by Holland et al and Moore and Rosenthal do not refer explicitly to teen films or teen television, but to films and television programming more widely, with Holland et al citing late night films on Channel Four as a key source of sexual information for male teens (2004: 67). Moore and Rosenthal are more positive about the role of teen programming in providing positive models of sexuality for adolescents, observing that 'teen soapies' often provide safe sex messages and discuss important social issues such as sexual harassment and non-consensual sex (2006: 116). Again, however, because Moore and Rosenthal are concerned with tracing broad cultural trends, the specifics of what programmes they are referring to are ill-defined, leading to doubt over textual meaning. For example, when they use the term 'teen soapies', are they referring here to an actual teenage continuous serial such as *Hollyoaks*, or to teen drama series such as *The O.C.* or *One Tree Hill* that are often referred to as 'teen soaps'? These distinctions in serial form are important, altering the way these 'important social issues' are framed. The following section will explore the issue of teenage sexual violence further.

Feminist Scholarship on Teenage Sexual Violence

The studies on young peoples' sexuality begin with a common recognition of gendered sexual inequality between men and women, mapping gendered differences in the sexual education, attitudes, experiences and behaviours of young people that contribute to unequal sexual relations and, furthermore, to male sexual dominance. Although these scholars are not exclusively concerned with the issue of teenage sexual violence, all contain chapters or sections on the topic. The study by Holland et al is primarily concerned with the relationship between power and sexuality and, thus, the issue of violence is often highlighted, while Lees and Moore and Rosenthal include chapters explicitly on sexual abuse.

All of the studies situate their discussion of sexual violence within the broader context of the social construction of gendered sexuality, arguing that traditional models of masculine and feminine sexualities contribute to and replicate uneven power relations between men and women. Lees argues that 'the dominant form of masculinity encourages boys to pressure girls into sex', a behaviour that is rationalised, not as sexual violence, but as a 'natural assertion of maleness' (1993: 3). Holland et al similarly argue that, 'sexual beliefs and practices are cultural constructions and a fundamental inequality between women and men is central to the conventions of heterosexuality in the UK and the USA' (2004: 2). This relationship between normative constructions of gendered sexuality and sexual violence, specifically in relation to teenagers, is a central concern of my project and thus, it is helpful to examine work on teenage sexual violence in more depth.

In recent years a growing body of feminist work on the prevalence of teenage heterosexual dating violence and a smaller literature on teenage sexual harassment has emerged, predominantly from a sociological perspective.¹⁴ Like the studies on teenage sexuality, this work emphasises the relationship between teenage gender socialisation and power imbalances. The dominance and entrenchment of hegemonic models of gendered sexuality, characterised by male sexual dominance and female sexual submission, is reflected in many of the research interviews with teenagers who view certain forms of sexual violence as normal and acceptable behaviour (Fineran and Bennett, 1999: 637).¹⁵

¹⁴ See Feldman and Gowen, 1998; Molitor and Tolman, 1998; Fineran and Bennett, 1999; Lavoie, Robitaille and Hebert, 2000; Black and Weisz, 2003; Brown, Chesney-Lind and Stein, 2007; Chung, 2007; Black et al, 2008; Valls, Puigvert and Duque, 2008.

¹⁵ This normalisation can also be attributed to dominant constructions of romance that promote passionate, superficial, temporary and volatile relationships in contrast to those that are presented as boring, stable, affectionate and passionless (Black and Weisz, 2003: 188; Valls, Puigvert and Duque, 2008).

This belief that sexual harassment is an aspect of normal teenage behaviour is highly problematic. Not only does it decriminalise this behaviour, but it ignores the effects that this harassment has on its victims (Fineran and Bennett, 1999: 627). Furthermore, as Lyn Mikel Brown, Meda Chesney-Lind and Nan Stein argue in their study of teen violence and victimisation, the current renaming of sexist and sexually abusive behaviour in US schools as ‘bullying’, a gender-neutral and all-encompassing term, operates to disguise gendered power relations and strip female victims of powerful legal rights (2007: 1251). Kat Banyard asserts that, ‘it is precisely this naturalising of the act, this insidious complacency it elicits which has enabled sexist bullying and harassment to flourish in classrooms across the world’ (2010: 70). This indicates just what is at stake in connecting teenage sexual violence to broader constructions of gendered sexuality, as my thesis sets out to do.

The difficulty of defining sexual violence is a recurring issue in this work. There is no consistent definition of this abuse. Lees’ conception of adolescent sexual violence, which she establishes from witnessing such behaviours in schools while carrying out her research, includes sexist jokes, sexual harassment and wider gender-based bullying (1993: 229). In contrast, Moore and Rosenthal establish their own definition of this violence in relation to more overtly physical and sexual behaviour, including verbal sexual coercion, sex occurring when the female is incapacitated, peer pressure to have sexual intercourse, uneven sexual power relations, miscommunication before or during sexual activity and engaging in sexual activity for fear of losing a partner’s interest as examples of sexual violence (2006: 222).

As aforementioned, many teenagers do not define certain types of sexual harassment as violent, making it difficult to establish a common understanding of the point at which sexual behaviour becomes abusive. Despite situating discussions of violence within the context of teenage heterosexual dating relationships, which suggests an interest in teenage sexual culture, work on teenage dating violence tends to highlight the *violent* rather than the *sexual* nature of this abuse.¹⁶ The study by Beverly Black and Arlene Weisz (2003) on dating violence amongst young African American teenagers prioritises physical acts of violence such as pushing, kicking and shoving, while Susan Fineran and Larry Bennett examine the overlap between peer sexual harassment and other forms of peer violence (1999: 629). These studies importantly emphasise the violent aspects of this abuse in order to assert how serious it is. However, this focus means that questions regarding the relationship between constructions of gendered sexuality and power are often overlooked.

¹⁶ This emphasis on the violent rather than the sexual aspect of sexual violence echoes feminist television scholarship on representations of sexual violence in teen drama series (see Bolte, 2008).

It is these questions that my thesis will engage with, by establishing an overview of representations of teenage sexuality in Chapter 4, into which my subsequent analysis chapters will be situated.

Furthermore, like the work on screen depictions of sexual violence, the studies on teenage sexual violence focus almost exclusively on male perpetrators and female victims of this abuse, thus obscuring the role that females may play in perpetuating gender sexual hierarchies. As Lees argues, ‘Girls too condone male violence and sometimes condemn other girls for reputed sexual promiscuity’, explaining that bullying among girls is often incited by attacks on girls’ sexual reputations (1993: 229). By considering gender relations between teenage characters in teen drama series rather than focusing solely on male sexual violence against women, my thesis will expand this focus.

Feminist Scholarship on Sexual Violence

As aforementioned, feminist work on teenage sexual violence tends to emphasise the physically violent nature of this abuse rather than considering the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. In contrast, a key question of my thesis is: what is *sexual* about representations of sexual violence in the teen drama series genre? It is helpful to explore feminist activist, MacKinnon’s work on sexual violence here as she has been central in challenging the feminist definition of rape as a crime of violence and not of sexuality. She argues that this definition operates to obscure considerations of everyday sexual behaviour that is pervasive and normalised, but that can often be violating to women (1982: 91-2). For MacKinnon, the social construction of gendered sexuality is fundamental to women’s oppression, arguing that, ‘gender socialization is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men’ (1982: 183). She explains that under these conditions of gender inequality, parallels exist between ordinary heterosexual initiation and sexual harassment, whereby if women’s sexuality is deemed to exist solely for men, it is difficult, nigh impossible, for women to refuse unwanted sexual advances (1982: 185). The social construction of heterosexuality which institutionalises male sexual dominance and female sexual submission, then, is the linchpin of gender inequality (MacKinnon, 1982: 185).

MacKinnon’s work is helpful for this project as she foregrounds the connections between dominant constructions of gender, sexuality and the pervasiveness of male sexual violence against women. Yet, MacKinnon focuses on a specific type of sexual abuse, namely heterosexual rape. While narratives involving rape do feature in teen drama series, these programmes also feature a range of other forms of sexual violence, including (but not

limited to) attempted rape, sexual assault, stalking and verbal sexual harassment.

Therefore, in light of this generic context, it is helpful to establish a broader definition of sexual violence.

It is for this reason that I have found it useful to examine Kelly's (1988) work on sexual violence as a continuum. Kelly explains that, 'the continuum of sexual violence ranges from extensions of the myriad forms of sexism women encounter everyday through to the all too frequent murder of women and girls by men' (1988: 97). She is directly influenced by MacKinnon in her desire to explore the connections between normalised heterosexual practice and male sexual violence against women (1988: 75). However, while MacKinnon focuses on rape, Kelly uses interviews with a volunteer sample of sixty women to create female-centred definitions of sexual violence, based on their experiences. These experiences range from more 'minor' and less physical incidents such as male leering, menacing staring, whistles, the use of innuendo and obscene phone-calls to more physical and sexually explicit incidents such as pressurized sex, coerced sex, rape and incest. Kelly argues that it is important to broaden definitions of sexual violence in order to challenge 'common sense' understandings of this abuse that 'reflect men's ideas and limit the range of male behaviour that is deemed unacceptable to the most extreme, gross and public forms' (1988: 138).

Her use of the term 'continuum' is not to imply that some forms of sexual violence are more significant than others, but rather to indicate that there is a direct relationship between different forms of male sexual abuse against women. She explains that incidents of sexual violence that may appear more 'minor', such as flashing, rely on the pervasive threat of further male sexual assault, thus creating a sense of generalised fear in women that in turn operates to reassert men's sexual dominance (1988: 97). What links different forms of sexually abusive behaviour, then, is fear, specifically the victim's perceptions of what may happen next. By emphasising this fear, Kelly is able to consider forms of male sexual behaviour that women have experienced as violating or abusive, but may not have defined explicitly as violent, thereby challenging dominant, patriarchal notions of what sexual violence is.¹⁷

Although she does not interview teenage girls about their experiences of sexual violence, Kelly's work has been cited by social researchers in this area, particularly in relation to her widening of sexual violence definitions (Lees, 1993; Lavoie, Robitaille and Hebert, 2000). Lees uses Kelly's continuum to explain the sense of sexual danger felt by her female teenage interviewees from their male classmates and older men (1993: 229).

¹⁷ Many of the women she interviewed experienced non-consensual sex on a regular basis, yet few defined their experiences as rape.

Kelly's notion of a continuum has also been used by social researchers as a way of defining child sexual abuse (Hooper, 1989; Hood, Everitt and Runnicles, 1998). While Tolman does not explicitly cite Kelly as an influence, her interviews with teenage girls support Kelly's notion of there being connections between different forms of male sexual violence against women and girls based on fear. She explains that, 'it is not only the experience but the constant *threat* and not always conscious *fear* of various forms of sexual violation, including sexual harassment, rape, and unwanted sexual attention that constitute a constant, low-grade trauma for girls and women' (2005: 52, *emphases original*).

Additionally, Kelly's research findings indicate that the social construction of gendered sexuality in childhood and adolescence has a central role to play in the female interviewees' experiences of sexual abuse. Her interviews reveal that experiences of pressurized and coercive sex are common not just in adult years but in teenage years too and can be partially attributed to the social construction of male sexuality in opposition to female sexuality.¹⁸ She concludes that while it is not possible to establish clear and fixed boundaries between different forms of sexual violence, 'the concept of a continuum both validates the abuse women feel and the shifting boundaries between these categories as their own understandings and definitions change over time' (1988: 116).

Kelly's notion of a continuum of male sexual violence against women is central to my thesis as it offers a way to challenge dominant definitions of sexual violence and to discuss sexual violence in a generic sense, which allows me to consider connections across a range of sexual violence representations. In particular, my emphasis on the relationship between this abuse and serial structures fits well with Kelly's continuum as situating these representations in relation to broader series' frameworks enables me to highlight representational and narrative patterns across several different forms of abuse, while still retaining an emphasis on their specificity. At the same time, structuring my chapters around the findings of this research rather than by specific types of violence allows me to view these different forms as inextricably related rather than distinct. Indeed, Kelly's argument that it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between different forms of sexual violence is reflected by representations of sexual violence in teen drama series, which can shade into one another (1988: 76). For example, stalking narratives often start out with non-physical forms of abuse – e.g. obscene phone calls, cyber-stalking, leering – and then culminate in attempted rapes.¹⁹

¹⁸ For example, males are taught that they have uncontrollable 'biological' sexual urges which must be released, while females are conditioned to feel responsible for these urges and to put male pleasure before their own.

¹⁹ See season five of *Beverly Hills* and season four of *One Tree Hill* (both of which I discuss in Chapter 6) for examples.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term ‘sexual violence’ to describe a range of sexually abusive behaviours, including physical forms – rape, attempted rape, sexual assault, sexually-motivated murder – and non-physical forms – obscene phone calls, stalking, sexual harassment and sexual blackmail. All of these behaviours are intrusive and are founded on the intention to shock, humiliate or frighten the victim (Kelly, 1988: 101). As my thesis is concerned with *teenage* sexual violence, I have omitted a discussion of sexual violence narratives involving both adult victims and perpetrators. Notably, these kinds of storylines are extremely rare. Following on from Kelly, the victim’s fear is central to my definition of sexual violence here. Thus, while it may seem counter-intuitive to define, for example, obscene phone calls as sexual violence – a term that implies explicit physical and sexual threat – nevertheless, these narratives rely for their impact on the victim’s fear of further abuse. The centrality of fear to my definition of sexual violence means that I have also omitted narratives involving alleged claims of sexual violence, which later turn out to be false.²⁰ I have also excluded a consideration of statutory rape narratives, as these storylines are characterised by a lack of fear on the younger person’s part and are not framed as sexual violence. For example, in *Beverly Hills* David is arrested for having sex with a minor, but is then let off as he was tricked into thinking the woman he slept with was older (see episode 909 ‘I’m Back Because’).

Reflecting the work on teenage dating violence discussed in the previous section, Kelly notes that there is a tendency to presume violence in intimate relationships is predominantly physical (1988: 133). However, she observes that sexual possessiveness is a common factor in precipitating physically violent assaults. Thus, in this thesis I have included forms of sexual violence that may appear, on first glance, to be physical, rather than sexual. For example, in Chapter 6 I discuss a narrative in *The O.C.* in which central female, Marissa, dies after she is run off the road by an ex-lover in a high-speed car chase. While the behaviour of her ex-lover is not explicitly sexual – he never directly touches Marissa – nevertheless, it is his sexual possessiveness and, in turn, his desire for sexual control over Marissa, that motivates his frenzied pursuit that results in her death.

Kelly’s continuum also offers a way to consider the relationship between common-sense understandings of sexual violence and everyday sexual behaviour that women and girls may not consciously experience as violence, but that nonetheless are constitutive of the ‘rape culture’. While my thesis will examine representations of rape in teen drama series, using Kelly’s continuum to define sexual violence more broadly allows me to explore other forms of sexual abuse that are also commonly depicted in this genre, such as

²⁰ For examples of this, see *Beverly Hills* episode 411 ‘Take Back the Night’ and *Dawson’s Creek* episode 306 ‘Secrets and Lies’.

attempted rape, stalking and sexual assault. Further, it opens up a way to consider sexually abusive behaviour that may not be framed explicitly as sexual violence diegetically by the characters involved. For example, many series feature storylines involving the spreading of malicious rumours about a particular female character's sexuality. While these narratives are rarely framed as sexual violence and are characterised by an absence of fear, they nevertheless operate to reinforce a culture of male sexual dominance and female sexual submission by silencing these females. I explore these sexual narratives further in Chapter 4.

The centrality of fear to my definition of sexual violence raises another important issue here. Storylines in which male heterosexual characters are sexually harassed by females are characterised by an absence of fear on the victim's part, reflecting the fact that the threat posed by these females is rarely serious. This lack of fear is inextricably related to the genre's dominant constructions of gendered sexuality, as I discuss further in Chapter 4. For this reason, I do not define these storylines as sexual violence. However, I do consider these narratives as a comparison to storylines in which females are sexually harassed by males in Chapter 6. Heterosexual male victims of sexual violence are rare in teen drama series, with the exception of episodic sexual violence storylines in the supernatural series, *Buffy* and *Smallville*. In both these programmes men are predominantly the perpetrators of sexual violence and women the victims, however, each series also features narratives in which these roles are reversed. I discuss the problems that arise when looking at sexual violence in these programmes in Chapter 5.

Where males are the victims of sexual violence is in relation to homophobic abuse storylines (see Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion). It is significant to note that both MacKinnon and Kelly focus exclusively on male heterosexual violence against women. As Lisa S. Price argues in her summary of MacKinnon's work on sex and sexuality, she pays scant attention to lesbianism or homosexuality in her analysis of the gendered sexual system, a neglect that she has been widely criticised for by other feminists (2005: 46). I maintain that dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity and, in turn, gendered sexuality operate to produce fundamental sexual inequalities between men and women, which contribute to male sexual violence against females. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that women and girls, not just men and boys, can also play a central role in perpetuating these gendered sexual inequalities and that men and boys can be victims too.

MacKinnon and Kelly are instrumental in challenging dominant definitions of sexual violence by emphasising the relationship of this abuse to social constructions of gendered sexuality. It is for this reason that I have considered their work at such length. In the following chapters I draw on and develop this work. Using MacKinnon's conception of

rape as primarily a *sexual* crime and Kelly's broad definition of different but interrelated forms of male sexual violence against women and girls, this project seeks to expand their heterosexual focus, by considering both males *and* females as potential perpetrators and survivors/victims of sexual abuse and by examining homophobic abuse storylines.

Conclusion

The two anthologies on teen television by Davis and Dickinson (2004) and Ross and Stein (2008) as well as the books, chapters and articles devoted to individual teen drama series in recent years indicate that teen television scholarship is a new and exciting field. This thesis will contribute to this emerging area of study, by considering teen drama series as a coherent genre with distinct textual markers and, further, by paying close attention to medium specificity – two areas that are often overlooked by existing teen television scholarship. A further aim of this thesis is to interrogate the relationship between representations of sexual violence and teenage sexuality. Byers' (1998) analysis of gendered sexuality in *My So-Called Life* as well as McCracken's (2007) examination of gender relations in *Buffy* provide useful models here, allowing me to move beyond the recurring feminist critical emphasis on heroines in isolation. There has been little work on representations of sexual violence in teen drama series and, thus, in the following chapters I will draw on and develop work on televisual depictions of sexual violence more widely by Mayne (1988), Cuklanz (2000), Projansky (2001) and Moorti (2002), using Kelly's notion of a continuum to broaden my definition of sexual violence. I will also challenge the dominant critical view of the teen drama series as a distinctly American genre by drawing on work on British youth television by Lury (2001) and Moseley's (2007) recent analysis of British teen dramas from 1968 to 1982, as well as comparative analyses of the histories of British and US teen programming (Osgerby, 2004; Martin, 2008) when looking at *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* in Chapter 8.

Following on from this, the next chapter (Chapter 3) will provide an overview of the methods that I will apply to my analysis. This discussions in this chapter indicate that teen drama series (and teenagers more generally) have rarely been approached on their own terms. Instead, adult agendas have shaped not only what is studied but also how it has been looked at. My aim is to challenge this approach by drawing on Mittell's argument that an attention to medium specificity is foundational to the categorisation of genres and, further, that programmes should be judged against their own like, rather than isolated as 'exceptional' and divorced from their broader generic contexts (Jacobs, 2001, 2006; Geraghty, 2003). Using this literature review as my starting point, then, the aim of Chapter

3 is to develop methods that will draw on and develop work that I have found useful as well as address the gaps and limitations that I have detected in existing teen and feminist television scholarship and feminist work on teenage sexuality and sexual violence. My goal is to open up a generic space where I can engage with the teen drama series and address both its televisual and teen elements when analysing textual representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence.

Chapter 3

Methodologies: Accounting for Medium and Generic Specificities

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the methods used to approach my analysis of representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence in teen drama series. Following on from the debates discussed in the previous chapter, my aim is to find a way to engage with these representations in the context of teen drama series as *television*, as a coherent *genre* with shared textual markers and as *series*. In order to do so, I will combine three separate but intricately related methodological approaches: close textual analysis, genre analysis and structuralism. This chapter is divided into three sections accordingly. I will then outline the findings of my narrative timeline research, introduced in Chapter 1, before offering some conclusions.

Analysing the Television Text

With their concern with issues of representation, both teen and feminist television scholarship have strong traditions of textual analysis. Yet, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, in this work textual analysis often means a particular focus on content and representation, rather than an interest in the formal, thematic or stylistic elements of teen programming. This scholarship often ignores issues of medium specificity and obscures the ambiguities and complexities inherent in serial television in order to make polemical claims about whether individual characters or series are progressive or regressive (see Spangler, 2003 for an example). This thesis aims to redress this neglect by paying close attention to the textual dimensions of teen drama series, examining such visual and aural features as camerawork, editing, *mise-en-scene*, dialogue and the soundtrack when looking at sexual violence representations, as well as considering their relationship to narrative, series' and generic structures. Thus, I will begin by engaging with key debates surrounding textual studies of television.

In the past, textual analysis has faced claims of being intellectually simplistic (Creeber, 2006: 83) as well as being purely an exercise of analytical skills and as such, 'nothing more than dry formalism' (Cardwell, 2006: 73). As Jacobs notes, historically this approach was criticised for focusing on television in a concentrated way in which it was

never intended to be watched (2001: 43). Criticisms of the methodology increased in the 1980s in the light of a growing awareness that viewers watched and made meaning from television texts in polysemic and complex ways. While a textual analyst may apply complicated theory to a text in order to determine its meaning, this is still only one interpretation of many. Thus, as Creeber explains, 'If audiences can read a text in a number of ways, then what is the validity and relevance of one textual interpretation?' (2006: 82).

This awareness has had a serious impact on textual studies of television, contributing to a critical fear of making evaluative judgements of texts. As Creeber further notes, 'If [scholars] offer [an] interpretation as conclusive and definitive, they are also in danger of falling into the trap of prescribing a "universal reader": i.e. implying that readers, regardless of age, gender, social class and race, will read a text in *exactly* the same way' (82, emphasis original). As Chapter 2 demonstrates, this is precisely the trap that much of the work on teen television and teenage viewers falls into, assuming a cause-and-effect relationship between what these young viewers watch and how they then behave and, in turn, ignoring variables (such as gender, age, race, class and nationality) that may affect their interpretation of texts. With no audience research to back up these claims about viewer identification, textual analysis is reduced to little more than guesswork (Creeber, 2006: 82).

However, in more recent years several television scholars have noted a resurgence of textual studies, which address some of these earlier methodological problems (Creeber, 2006; Cardwell, 2006; Jacobs, 2006). Scholars now recognise the limitations of textual analysis and as such, rather than proposing only one dominant reading of texts, their work is more open and self-reflexive. Reflecting this, textual analysis is now rarely used in isolation. In his book *TV Drama in Transition* (1997), Robin Nelson contextualises textual analysis of popular television drama series in relation to technical, economic, institutional, cultural and aesthetic developments over the past forty years, while Jacobs' (2000) *Intimate Screen* combines textual studies of early television drama with detailed archival research. Indeed, scholars such as Jacobs (2001) and Sarah Cardwell (2006) propose using textual analysis as a starting point before moving outwards.

While issues of quality and judgement have traditionally been avoided in television studies for fear of accusations of subjectivity, this renewed scholarly interest has been accompanied by a shift towards making explicit judgements about value and quality in relation to television aesthetics (Nelson, 1997; Jacobs, 2001, 2006; Geraghty, 2003; Cardwell, 2006). These scholars now propose using textual analysis not only as an interpretative tool, but also an evaluative one. Issues of personal taste are often at the forefront of these debates. For example, in *Interpreting Television*, which focuses on the

formal elements of television texts, Lury makes personal taste explicit from the outset, admitting in her introduction that she selected her objects of study from her own viewing experience and memories (2005: 2). Jacobs offers a more extreme example. His analysis of television aesthetics stems directly from a desire to articulate his love of certain programmes (2001, 2006).

Cardwell outlines some of the problems of using television aesthetics to make value judgements explaining that, ‘One of the most common objections mounted against increasing the role of evaluation within television studies is that it will lead to a narrow “canon” of “good television”, eliminating too many programmes as unworthy of study’ (2006: 75). Yet, as Brunsdon observes, qualitative judgements have always been central to television studies, they have just remained implicit (1990: 74). This is particularly true of teen television studies, which has focused almost exclusively on a narrow range of US ‘quality’ drama series with cross-over adult appeal, yet has largely failed to address this bias. Nelson acknowledges this scholarly hesitation to engage openly with debates about quality as a ‘self-deceiving evasion’ (1997: 7).

As Brunsdon (1990) and Geraghty (2003) note, popular and denigrated television genres need not be excluded from evaluative judgements. However, they need to be judged against their own like. To make these judgements meaningful, distinctions must be made between ‘television’ and specific genres and programmes instead of unfairly pitting different genres against one another. Jacobs (2001) and Geraghty (2003) both point to the necessity of situating individual programmes in relation to broader generic distinctions when making evaluative judgements. Jacobs usefully illustrates the value in doing so, observing that it would be nonsensical to judge a DIY manual by the same standards as a fictional novel: both have different functions and goals and, thus, criteria for judgement must be developed in relation to specific instances (2001: 429). He argues that television scholars need to think more about the particular aspirations of specific programmes and genres, rather than about television more widely (430).

Jacobs’ essay is particularly useful to consider here as he explicitly engages with the problems of making evaluative judgements about dramatic *serials* based on their textual elements (2001: 433). He argues that, ‘There is no question that a deeper and fuller understanding of *ER* can be achieved by watching all of it, every episode, a fact that raises considerable practical problems for the interested scholar if the serial is lengthy’ (2001: 434). As he explains, series are inherently messy: they are unfinished, open-ended and, as they span multiple episodes and seasons, they are often inconsistent in terms of their value (2001: 433). These inconsistencies are often overlooked in more popular academic television scholarship, in which the rush to publish on new programmes means that texts

are judged after only one season (for an example, see the discussion of Braithwaite's analysis of *Veronica Mars* in Chapter 7).

I will return to the challenges involved in analysing long-running series later in this chapter, but for now, I want to engage with Jacobs' approach to studying series on a textual level. He argues that to fully understand and judge an episode, it needs to be contextualised within a broader series' framework (2001: 435). He reinforces this view through close textual analysis of an individual episode of *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009). On the surface, as he points out, the episode in question appears clichéd and overly sentimental. However, knowledge of the rest of the series as well as particular characters' back stories alters this initial reading, lending weight to small details such as glances between characters or lingering shots. He then opens his reading out to argue that, 'Our judgements of value are as much reliant on comparisons between members of a genre as it is between episodes of a particular show', using a comparative analysis of the title sequences of several US and British hospital dramas to reinforce his point (2001: 442).

While I am a fan of many of the series that I am looking at, unlike Jacobs my motivation is not to argue for a particular programme's worth. However, I do concur that there is value in analysing several texts of the same genre alongside one another in order to fully account for generic specificity and also uncover structural patterns. As I shall go on to explore in the following section, 'The assumption underlying genre study is that television programs resemble one another and that grouping them together provides a context for understanding the meanings of a particular program' (Butler, 2002: 338).

In 2006, Jacobs wrote another article on television aesthetics and issues of judgement, reflecting back on this earlier piece in light of new scholarship that had emerged since. In this essay he enters into a debate about Geraghty's work, which raises some interesting questions about how television scholars may use evaluative judgements in future. Geraghty (2003) argues that a clear evaluative method can be developed through which scholars can make judgements about 'quality' and is perplexed by Jacobs' reluctance to make his evaluations of particular programmes explicit. Jacobs, however, disagrees that such a method can be formed. Where the two scholars agree, however, is on the inclusion of a consideration of textual elements when making value judgements about television and on a need to consider programmes in the context of their specific genre. This is particularly useful in relation to teen drama series. As Chapter 2 illustrates, this scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on individual characters, episodes and programmes, divorced from their 'teen' generic context. Further, a sense of dis-identity between the adult academic and teenage viewer shapes this work, which has resulted in programmes being studied almost exclusively on adult terms and an over-emphasis on

texts with cross-over adult appeal. This provides a neat bridge to the second section of this chapter on television genre analysis.

Analysing Television Genre

Textual studies and genre analysis go hand in hand. Illustrating their symbiotic relationship, the decline in textual analysis of television in the 1980s was accompanied by a decline in television genre studies (Mittell, 2004: 7). While genre analysts recognise the importance of extra-textual elements such as audience reception and marketing in creating generic categories, they return again and again to the text as the primary site of generic meaning (Neale, 2001; Jacobs, 2003; Bignell, 2004; Bignell and Orlebar, 2005). For example, in *An Introduction to Television Studies*, Jonathan Bignell argues that although the study of genre is based on the identification of shared textual features across a range of programmes, the aim of this analysis is to explain how audiences classify genres (2004: 114). This requires a move away from a purely textual study to consider extra-textual materials such as marketing and the presence of particular performers and actors. Ultimately, however, he uses textual examples to illustrate how genres are formed. Despite this textual focus, analysts of television genre often import genre theories from film and literature, which results in the televisual elements of texts becoming obscured. This has been highly problematic for the development of television genre theory as I shall now go on to explore.

In the previous chapter I touched upon the problems of applying literary and cinematic genre theories to television in relation to judgements about the ‘quality’ status of teen drama series. I explained that this tendency opens television texts up to unfair dismissal, reinforcing Geraghty (2003) and Jacobs’ (2001) view that television genres and programmes should be judged against their own kind. Using genre theories from other media to describe television means that the issue of medium specificity can be overlooked. As Mittell explains, this is particularly troubling as the televisual aspects of a particular text are foundational to the programme’s generic category (2004: 2). Further, as he explains, film genres have often been approached through the notion of an auteur, such as Douglas Sirk in relation to melodrama or John Carpenter in relation to horror (2). In contrast, television programmes tend to be collaborative projects. Particularly in the case of long-running series and serials, writers and directors change frequently.²¹

²¹ It is significant to note that Mittell is writing exclusively about US television here. As Geraghty (2003) observes, British television has a much stronger tradition of the playwright. Thus, she recognises and welcomes author-led approaches to studying television aesthetics and genre.

Other scholars have also commented upon the problems of approaching television genre on literary and/or cinematic terms. Feuer (1987) explains that literary genre theory uses broad categories such as ‘comedy’, ‘tragedy’ and ‘melodrama’ that span numerous centuries, cultures and bodies of work (1992: 139). Yet, to apply such a broad term as ‘comedy’ to television or film makes little sense. Further distinctions are needed, such as screwball comedy in relation to film or situation comedy in relation to television. Notably, unlike literary genres, these generic categories are historically specific. The screwball comedy, for example, arose in the 1930s and the term is rarely used as a descriptive marker of contemporary films. Feuer (1987) explains that, ‘one of the dangers of a generic approach is a built-in tendency to structuralize the model in such a way that it is impossible to explain changes or to see the genre as a dynamic model’ (1992: 151). To avoid this, I will examine teen drama series across an eighteen year period, starting with *Beverly Hills* in 1990, which is recognised as one of the first examples of the genre. This then allows me to analyse how generic features are solidified and/or adapted in the period of the genre’s development and growth. Although he explores a much longer time period, a precedent can be found in Jacobs’ (2003) *Body Trauma TV*, which carefully maps how the hospital series has changed over a fifty year period.

Further complicating the categorisation of television genres, television has a strong tendency towards generic hybridity, making it very difficult to determine where generic boundaries lie. As Bignell and Jeremy Orlebar explain, each programme in a television schedule requires both similarity to and difference from other programmes in order to establish its own identity (2005: 60). In relation to teen drama series, this has resulted in programmes that share several textual features (as I shall go on to explore in the following chapter), but that also each have distinctive elements that set them apart. For example, *Veronica Mars* has noir elements, *Hex* has horror elements, *Gossip Girl* is an aspirational teen series set in East Coast USA and *The O.C.* is similarly aspirational, but is set in West Coast USA. This genre mixing leads Davis and Dickinson to question if there is such a category as a coherent teen genre (2004: 3). Notably, this hybridity is not unique to teen programming. Mittell’s book, for example, begins with a discussion of whether *Northern Exposure* (CBS, 1991-1995) is a sitcom or a drama, illustrating this difficulty of pinning television genres down (2004: xi).

Yet, as Mittell usefully points out, the tendency towards generic hybridity in contemporary television actually operates to reassert how important genres are by

Julia Hallam (2005) provides an example of this approach with her work on genre in relation to Lynda La Plante.

highlighting and problematising implicit generic assumptions (2004: xiii). *Veronica Mars* blends teen and noir elements, but both of these genres are important within the text, particularly in relation to how it frames sexual violence, as I shall discuss further in Chapter 7. At the same time, Mittell rejects the tradition of looking inwardly at the text as the core site of generic meaning. As I illustrated in Chapter 2, however, to assume too expansive an approach to the teen drama series risks obscuring the genre's dramatic and serial elements. Indeed, as Jeremy Butler explains, 'To be useful as a method for interpreting television...genre study needs to be more precise in its understanding of the genre. Otherwise generic boundaries blur' (2002: 338). Mittell, himself, illustrates the value of detailed textual analysis with a lengthy piece on the pilot of *Veronica Mars* (2009).

While I agree with Mittell that the text is not the *only* site of generic meaning, my decision to take a textual approach to the teen drama series genre is motivated by a recognition that there has been an absence of sustained academic attention to these programmes' shared textual features. While teen television scholarship is dominated by textual studies, these tend to focus on individual characters, episodes and texts and rarely move beyond a focus on representation and content. In particular, seriality is often overlooked in favour of broad episode synopses. It is this that I will address in the following section.

Structuralist Approaches to Narrative: From Propp to Fiske

While close textual analysis is a useful approach for studying moments of sexual violence and genre analysis allows me to contextualise these moments within teen drama series more widely, neither of these methods is able to fully account for the *seriality* of these texts. This thesis is also centrally concerned with the relationship of representations of sexual violence to narrative and series' structures. One of the main challenges of this project has been to manage analysis of fourteen teen drama series at once and to find a way to emphasise their similarity to one another without erasing important differences between them that may also arise. A structuralist approach has provided a way to do so and thus, in this section I will explore structuralism in more depth.

Structuralism shares a central concern with genre analysis. As Butler explains, the most common means of defining genre is by subject matter. When approaching genre in this way, 'the critic hypothesizes a narrative structure that is shared by the programs within the genre, and conventional characters that inhabit the narrative structure' (Butler, 2002:

340). Like genre analysis, structuralism is concerned with identifying a shared narrative structure between texts in order to gain a better understanding of how these narratives function. As Ellen Seiter (1987) further explains, 'A structuralist analysis often leads to a description of the worldview of a culture - its organizing principles for making sense of relationships among people who live in the same society and between people and their material environments' (1992: 50). It stems from the belief that narratives have much in common and need to be studied in relation to one another. Thus, context is crucial to this work. Structural analysts impose binary oppositions on texts, arguing that every element derives its meaning from its relationship to other categories in the same system (Seiter, 1992: 50). This emphasis on relationships between elements is particularly helpful when considering the representation of gender relations in teen series. Using this approach provides a way of moving beyond the existing feminist critical emphasis on individual heroines. Further, it enables me to consider teen drama series alongside each other rather than on their own.

As John Corner notes in relation to television studies, structuralists examine narratives in relation to one another in an attempt to make deeper ideological connections than might be enabled by analysing one programme, character, episode or moment in isolation (1999: 50). This work rests on the belief that television naturalises and thus, obscures dominant mainstream ideologies, which then 'become a function of its modes of portrayal, its camera viewpoints, its scenes of revealed (rather than described) character qualities, all aspects of the realized narrative' (Corner, 1999: 51). Thus, as David Buxton explains, 'the task of the analyst was to reveal, beneath the appearance of obvious discourse, the hidden contradictions of the dominant ideology' (1990: 5). This emphasis on contradictions poses a problem for the structural analysis of teen drama series. These programmes are predominantly popular, mainstream texts and, as such, their narrative structures largely support the status quo. However, as I go on to discuss later in this chapter, assuming a structuralist approach to these texts not only allows me to account for their structural similarities but also begins to reveal striking differences in relation to particular series' generic hybridity, broadcasting context and protagonist's gender. These differences shape the structure of Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

One of the greatest benefits of analysing teen drama series structurally is that this methodology traditionally sets aside questions of aesthetic worth and value, to instead 'concentrate on the internal rules for the production of television meaning' (Seiter, 1992: 49-50). The aim of this approach is to understand a language or culture on its own terms. This method, then, is particularly useful to apply to the teen drama series genre, which has so often been ignored or dismissed by scholars in favour of elevating 'exceptional' texts.

When teen television scholarship does engage with issues of genre, it is often careless. In contrast, as Seiter (1987) argues, ‘the application of structuralist methods has made television criticism more rigorous, more accurate in describing its object, and less evaluative’ (1992: 50).

So far this discussion has been fairly abstract. To provide a concrete example of structuralist methods, I turn to Vladimir Propp (1928/1968), whose work on the narrative organisation of Russian folktales has been extremely influential in the development of structural analysis and is widely cited, not just by literary scholars, such as Tzvetan Todorov (1977), but by television scholars too (Feuer, 1986; Fiske, 1987; Kozloff, 1987; Buxton, 1990; Corner, 1999; Butler, 2002). Propp examined one hundred folktales and, by mapping recurring themes, revealed a universal narrative structure across all of them (1928/1968: 19). In his book, *Morphology of the Folktale*, he outlines the central tenets of his findings (1928/1968: 20-3):

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale,

independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the

fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.
3. The sequence of functions is always identical
4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure

Notably, he foregrounds characters here, yet he is not interested in who they are as individuals, but rather in how they function. As he illustrates by describing the dominant narrative structure of four folktales, while the specifics of their characters may vary, their function remains the same (1928/1968: 20). He does, however, make some distinctions here. Not all fairytales contain all functions, but this does not change the law of sequence (1928/1968: 22). (I consider Propp’s findings in more depth in the following chapter.)

Propp’s emphasis on the functions of characters rather than their individual characteristics provides a way to move away from the specific to the general, which is highly beneficial for my thesis. To look at specific sexual violence narratives across fourteen series would not only be incredibly difficult to manage, but would also be largely redundant. Focusing too much on specific instances risks both losing sight of a bigger picture and veering into irrelevance. Instead, mapping how sexual violence functions narratively across the genre allows me to discern deeper ideological patterns. Chapters 5

and 6 are structured around these dominant narrative functions, in relation to episodic and overarching storylines respectively.

Another key and widely cited figure in the development of structural analysis is literary theorist, Todorov. In *Television Culture* (1987), John Fiske draws heavily on his model of narrative (1977) when outlining a structural approach to studying television. Todorov describes his model of narrative as follows:

An “ideal” narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical (1977: 111).

Using this model, Fiske then explains that the ideology of narrative can be determined in two ways, either by comparing the opening and closing states of equilibrium or by identifying what constitutes a force of disruption and what a force of stability (1987: 139). He explains that, ‘the ideological work is at its clearest in the selection of *which* events are considered to disrupt or restore *which* equilibrium and in the description of what constitutes disequilibrium’ (139, emphasis original).

Yet, applying Todorov’s model of narrative to television poses particular problems as Fiske explores in relation to Feuer’s (1986) conception of television narrative. Feuer stresses that, ‘television is not very well described by models of narrative analysis based on linearity and resolution’ (1986: 101). She explains that series and serials are television’s dominant narrative forms and both are inherently more open than films and novels. Television’s emphasis on routine repetition and the deferral of closure means that the narrative tension between harmony and disruption that Todorov highlights is never fully resolved. Indeed, using an example from a novel, Todorov argues that the initial equilibrium can never be re-established (1977: 112). However, this does not hold true for television. The traditional situation comedy, for example, often features a circular narrative that returns at its end to its point of departure (Mills, 2005).

Further problems arise from applying structural theories of narrative to television. For example, Fiske applies Propp’s account of patterns of narrative organisation to an episode of *Bionic Woman* (ABC/NBC, 1976- 78) and finds that, ‘in general the structure underlies the typical television narrative with remarkable consistence’ (1987: 138). However, Buxton criticises Fiske’s use of Propp (1990: 9). He argues that if there is really only one story (as Fiske suggests with his argument that Propp’s narrative functions fit with *Bionic Woman*), then theoretical development is impossible, making this approach a critical dead-end. Notably, Buxton’s argument about structuralism and television is very similar to one by Todorov in relation to literature. Although Todorov is heavily influenced

by Propp's work, he identifies a central tension in structuralist theory between the general and the specific (1977: 219). He argues that, 'either we construct a coherent but sterile theory, or we limit ourselves to describing "facts", assuming that each little stone will find its place in the great edifice of science' (1977: 218). Like Buxton, then, Todorov identifies a danger of structuralist theory becoming too rigid and prescriptive. He adds that, 'the most urgent task of the analysis of narrative is to be found precisely between the two: in the *specification* of the *theory*, in the elaboration of "intermediate" categories which no longer describe the general but the generic, no longer the generic but the specific' (1977: 219, *emphases original*). This is what my thesis sets out to do: on the one hand, by using a structuralist approach, I aim to identify structural similarities between teen drama series as a genre, yet, on the other hand, I also aim to highlight the differences that arise between these texts. This sensitivity to difference is possible because I supplement a structural approach with textual analysis and a close attention to genre. Structural analysis allows me to uncover broader patterns across the genre in where sexual violence narratives are positioned, while textual analysis enables me to draw out nuances in particular storylines that may or may not contradict these broader patterns.

One of the ways that I do this is by paying close attention to how the genre has developed since 1990. Like genre analysis, claims of ahistoricity are a common criticism of structuralism (Seiter, 1992: 59). Indeed, Buxton criticises Fiske for exactly this. He does not find the fit of Propp with *Bionic Woman* 'remarkable', expanding that with television's routine repetition and unwillingness to take risks, it is not surprising that plots are repeated again and again. Thus, he challenges Fiske's ahistoricity, arguing that:

Given the narrow range of stories considered commercially acceptable, any analysis of the content of series must also concentrate on what makes them different over time, inverting the tendency of structuralism to reduce surface differences into similar structures (1990: 9-10).

Another common criticism of structuralism is that by imposing binary values onto texts, it closes down any stray meanings (Seiter, 1992: 56). Echoing traditional criticisms of textual analysis, there is a view that because structural analysts do not look beyond the text to consider how real viewers make sense of it, they, therefore, ignore the polysemic ways in which viewers make meanings from texts. Yet, as Seiter points out, this is a somewhat unfair criticism. Structuralists often insist on being highly self-critical of their own research and, therefore, do not exclude other meanings by imposing their own. At the same time, however, it is important to be aware of the limitations of using a structuralist methodology in isolation. Indeed, Seiter argues that in order to be able to explain the differences between texts, structuralism needs to be studied alongside genre, narrative or

ideological analysis (1992: 60). This is precisely what I set out to do, as I shall illustrate in the following section.

Narrative Timelines

I began my research by undertaking extensive viewing of drama series with prominent teenage characters in order to firstly define the genre. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, this approach is somewhat paradoxical: an aim of this project is to identify the genre's norms (as I develop in the following chapter), yet before I could do this, I needed to delineate some initial generic boundaries. From this viewing, I established a working definition of the genre and selected fourteen programmes to study in more detail - a small enough sample to be manageable, but still wide enough to enable me to consider differences between texts. Drawing on MacKinnon's definition of rape as a primarily sexual crime and Kelly's notion of sexual violence as a continuum, I then established a working definition of sexual violence (see Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion).

However, while I watched each episode, halfway through my research it became apparent that I had perhaps over-estimated the manageability of my sample, which encompasses over a thousand episodes (1130 to be precise). There was a danger of the research becoming overly specific and, thus, veering into irrelevance. While my focus on moments of sexual violence yielded some interesting results, such as the absence of storylines with heterosexual male victims and the shorter length of British sexual violence narratives, it did not allow me to make connections across the genre more widely. In short, I was in danger of replicating the focus of existing teen and feminist television scholarship on isolated moments, episodes, characters and programmes that I set out to challenge.

For this reason, I turned to structuralist theories of narrative with their focus on systems as a whole and on underlying narrative patterns. This emphasis on generic and series' structures was also well-suited to Kelly's notion of a continuum of sexual violence as it enabled me to discern connections across a range of different forms of abuse. Moreover, this approach allowed me to think less about the specifics of each narrative and more about how sexual violence storylines function narratively and ideologically across the genre as a whole.

For each series, I constructed a horizontal narrative timeline (see Appendix B for more detail). On this line, I marked each episode as well as breaks between seasons. I then returned to my viewing to establish where episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives occurred within broader series' structures. From these viewing notes, I firstly mapped where episodic sexual violence narratives occurred on each timeline, using a

yellow circle. In most cases, marking these episodic storylines was fairly straightforward, particularly as they are, by definition, self-contained and do not bleed over into other episodes. However, there were a few narratives that caused problems. *Gossip Girl*, for example, features a sexual violence narrative in the pilot episode in which central female character, Jenny, is sexually assaulted by central male character, Chuck. (I discuss this storyline in more detail in Chapter 5). This assault is self-contained – it is not discussed for the rest of the season – and for this reason, I labeled it as episodic.²² However, it is questionable if a storyline involving central characters as both perpetrator and victim is strictly self-contained as, arguably, a viewer's knowledge of this narrative affects how they respond to and read Chuck in future episodes.

I then mapped where over-arching sexual violence narratives were positioned, using a horizontal blue line that spanned from the first episode in which the narrative is introduced to its endpoint. This proved more difficult as some storylines would disappear for several episodes and then reappear at a later date. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 6, some over-arching sexual violence storylines feature two narrative climaxes: the first when the perpetrator initially attacks and then, when it seems as if the threat has been quelled, a second, more violent attack a few episodes later. In these cases, the blue line spans from the first attack until the resolution of the storyline after the second attack. Further, as is characteristic of the open-ended nature of serial television, these narratives did not always have a definitive endpoint, often fading out slowly over a number of episodes as the emotional aftermath on the victim subsides. In these cases, I chose my endpoint as the last episode in which the sexual violence narrative is directly referenced.

A central aim of this thesis is to identify the relationship between representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence in teen drama series. For this reason, I also mapped significant moments in the sexual culture of each programme. I firstly marked the episode in which each central teenage character lost their virginity, using a solid green circle. I then differentiated these narratives from each time a central teenage character had a subsequent sexual partner, by marking these episodes with a green ring. This revealed glaring differences in the sexual cultures of each show. For example, *Smallville* is a relatively chaste programme, while the teenage characters of British series have multiple sexual partners (I discuss this further in Chapter 8). Finally, I mapped the central teenage characters' romantic relationships, using a horizontal red line beginning from their first date and/or kiss to their break ups.

²² Notably, the narrative does recur in season two when Chuck finally apologises to Jenny, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

From examining these timelines, what is immediately apparent is how prevalent representations of sexual violence are across the genre and that representations of teenage sexual violence are a part of both US and British teen series (Table 3.1).

Series name	Number of episodic sexual violence narratives	Number of over-arching sexual violence narratives
<i>Beverly Hills 90210</i>	3	8
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	11	4
<i>Dawson's Creek</i>	0	2
<i>Freaks and Geeks</i>	0	0
<i>Friday Night Lights</i>	0	1
<i>Gossip Girl</i>	1	0
<i>Hex</i>	1	1
<i>My So-Called Life</i>	2	0
<i>The O.C.</i>	1	3
<i>One Tree Hill</i>	1	2
<i>Skins</i>	1	2
<i>Smallville</i>	16	1
<i>Sugar Rush</i>	0	1
<i>Veronica Mars</i>	6	6

Table 3.1 Numbers of Episodic and Overarching Sexual Violence Narratives in Teen Drama Series

The most common form of sexual violence narrative in teen drama series is the self-contained episode, which I look at in Chapter 5. There are forty-three of these episodic sexual violence narratives in total, spread across ten out of the fourteen programmes that I examined. *Sugar Rush*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Dawson's Creek* and *Friday Night Lights* did not contain any. Episodes of *Sugar Rush* are only twenty-minutes long, compared with episodes in the other teen series that typically last forty-minutes. As such, rarely do storylines span just one episode. *Freaks and Geeks* is primarily a comedic series and, with the exception of storylines that depict (nonsexual) tension between the teenage characters and their parents, does not typically focus on serious social issues, including sexual violence. *Dawson's Creek* prioritises the teenage characters' personal, psychological problems rather than wider social issues. While it does feature two overarching sexual violence storylines, they are short, spanning only two to three episodes each (I discuss these narratives further in Chapter 6). By contrast, *Friday Night Lights* regularly focuses

on serious issues, featuring an attempted rape storyline that stretches over seasons one and two, yet it is much more serial in nature and thus episodes are rarely self-contained (again, I discuss this attempted rape narrative in Chapter 6).

Of the series that did contain episodic sexual violence narratives, six contained just one each, while the remaining four contained several. With the exception of *Veronica Mars*, the four series that contained the most were the longest running series that I examined. Yet, although at ten seasons long *Beverly Hills 90210* was by far the longest, there were considerably more self-contained sexual violence narratives in *Buffy* and *Smallville*. Indeed, supernatural series account for two-thirds of all episodic sexual violence narratives across the genre. This suggests a particular affinity between supernatural series and representations of sexual violence, which I shall explore further in Chapter 5.

These narratives are more common in early seasons of series, when the teenage characters are still attending high school and living with their parents. In all but two of the programmes featuring these types of storylines, the first sexual violence narrative occurred within the first nine episodes of season one. There is no pattern as to where in the seasons the episodes occur, although they rarely coincide with season finales. The regularity of these storylines in early seasons can be partially explained by the need for programmes to build audiences as they begin. Self-contained episodes allow series to do this, as viewers need no prior knowledge of previous storylines to understand what is happening. Once the programme has become more established, storylines tend to become more serial in nature, stretching across several episodes.

With the exception of *Freaks and Geeks* and *Gossip Girl*, all of the series feature overarching sexual violence narratives. Most series contain one to four storylines, with *Beverly Hills*, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* containing the most. These overarching narratives are more common from the mid 1990s onwards. For example, the first overarching sexual violence narrative in *Beverly Hills* only appears when the teenagers are at university in season five, which aired in 1995. In the other teen series, these overarching narratives are more common in earlier seasons when characters are still at high school, but do not appear for the first time until the end of season one or later. (I discuss possible reasons for this structural positioning in Chapter 6).

One of the main insights to be gained from this structural analysis of over-arching narratives is their positioning in relation to central teenage characters' romantic relationships. These storylines either immediately precede romance narratives, coincide with the end of these relationships or directly follow the end of a romantic relationship. This suggests that these romance and sexual violence narratives are inextricably linked, as

I go on to explore in Chapter 6. The key exception is homophobic abuse narratives, which tend to remain distinct from romantic relationships.

Another striking finding of the timeline research is that sexual violence narratives are positioned differently in series featuring heterosexual heroines from 1997 onwards, in contrast to those with male protagonists or ensemble casts. These structural differences transcend national boundaries. *Hex*, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* all feature sexual violence narratives in their pilot and finale episodes. *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* also feature concurrent sexual violence storylines (usually one episodic and one overarching). Chapter 7 explores sexual violence storylines in female-fronted series in more depth, questioning how these structural differences alter how these storylines are framed.

British and US series differ considerably in terms of their structures. One season of *The O.C.* is longer, for example, than two seasons of *Skins*. For this reason, I look at *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* in Chapter 8. Due to this shorter structure, British sexual violence narratives sit somewhere in between episodic and over-arching, neither strictly contained to one episode, nor spanning more than two.

These findings determine the content and/or structure of the following analysis chapters. After identifying these broad structural patterns, I returned to close textual analysis of specific sexual violence narratives, tracing dominant narrative functions in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of how sexual violence operates ideologically. The patterns uncovered through this research reinforce the value of analysing several programmes alongside one another in order to gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of stories about sexual violence that emerge within this context. As Seiter (1987) concludes, structuralism should be used ‘as a kind of useful exercise for making sure that we know our object before venturing out into other models of study’ (1992: 63).

Conclusion

As the debates in this chapter suggest, all three distinct but overlapping methodologies – textual analysis, genre study and structural analysis – offer particular insights. Combining them is particularly suitable for an exploration of the relationship between representations of sexual violence and broader narrative, generic and series’ structures. Overall, this combination strengthens my analysis by allowing me to account for the televisual, generic and serial elements of teen drama series as well as to explore, more specifically, how generic and medium specificity intersect with representations of sexual violence. A comparative analysis of British and US texts further offers a way to

account for the ways in which particular broadcasting and social contexts affect these representations.

Structuralist approaches, with their emphasis on systems as a whole and on patterns of narrative organisation, provide a way to account for the *serial* aspect of television texts. However, as Sarah Kozloff (1987) observes,

Because this field is concerned with general mappings of narrative structure, it is inescapably and unapologetically “formalist” (that is, it concentrates on describing or analyzing the text’s intrinsic formal parameters), and it is up to the individual practitioner to use the insights gained about narrative structure to analyze a text’s content or ideology (1992: 68).

This is precisely what my thesis will do: I use the insights gained from the narrative timelines to determine the structure of the following analysis chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). I then use genre and close textual analysis to examine how representations of sexual violence function narratively and ideologically. By doing so, I hope to counter the formalism of structuralism by opening up rather than closing down possible textual interpretations. All three of these methodological approaches also face accusations of being inherently ahistorical, which I seek to counter by examining teen drama series that span an eighteen year period (Buxton, 1990). This then enables to me to discern developments across the genre over time. In the following chapter (Chapter 4), I provide a structural overview of the dominant generic sexual narratives in the teen drama series. This then establishes a context into which I will situate my subsequent analysis chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8), enabling me not only to approach sexual representations on the genre’s own terms, but also to discern connections between representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence.

Chapter 4

Glances, Dances, Romances: Overview of Sexual Narratives in Teen Drama Series

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the teen drama series' generic norms, paying close attention to the genre's formal organisation and its sexual narratives. As the previous chapters indicate, scholarship on teen drama series has tended to focus on individual programmes, often overlooking considerations of their teen generic elements in favour of elevating them as 'exceptional' and, thus, worthy of critical attention. By contrast, structuralist analyses of texts set aside questions of worth to instead interrogate the internal laws that govern their narrative structures. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the formal elements of the teen drama series in order to establish a generic context into which the subsequent analysis chapters will be situated. I argue throughout this thesis that this contextualisation offers a fuller understanding of how representations of sexual violence function narratively and ideologically.

In terms of their formal narrative strategies, teen drama series can be understood in relation to television drama series more widely. As Moseley explains, many teen series follow a similar narrative organisation to the soap opera, with their emphasis on repetition, the deferral of resolution, use of close ups and centrality of place, characters and relationships (2001: 41). The first three sections of this chapter will be structured around the formal organisation of the genre, looking specifically at time, space and character. Here, I also challenge the dominant critical view of the teen drama series as an inherently US genre by considering British and US texts alongside each other and highlighting their similarities. (I look at British series in more detail in Chapter 8).

In each section, I pay close attention to how these formal elements intersect with representations of teenage sexuality and sexual violence. Indeed, a central aim of this thesis is to identify the genre's sexual norms and interrogate the relationship between these norms and narratives of sexual violence. As I established in Chapter 2, sociological work on teenage sexual violence has tended to emphasise the violent rather than the *sexual* aspects of this behaviour. In contrast, MacKinnon argues that dominant constructions of gendered sexuality are foundational to gendered inequality (1982: 185). Thus, in the fourth

section of this chapter, I move on to explore significant recurring sexual narratives across the genre, before offering some conclusions.

The Organisation of Narrative and Time

The increasing blurring of distinctions between television series and serial narrative forms has been well-documented by scholars over the past three decades (Feuer, 1987, 1995; Geraghty, 1990; Turner, 2001; Creeber, 2001, 2004; Mittell, 2006). In the context of teen drama series, this series/serial hybridity has resulted in a mix between self-contained narratives that are resolved within one episode, often featuring short-term characters, and ongoing narratives that span multiple episodes, often dealing with the relationships between core characters. As discussed in the previous chapter, in teen drama series, episodic storylines are more common in early seasons as programmes establish a viewership (I discuss these narratives further in the following chapter). They also occur more frequently in programmes that began in the early to mid 1990s. The first four seasons of *Beverly Hills* are dominated by self-contained storylines that are resolved by the end of the episode. While series from the mid 1990s onwards still heavily feature episodic narratives, these tend to run concurrently with longer, overarching storylines.

This shift from the episodic to the serial is widely attributed to series adopting the narrative conventions of soap operas (Turner, 2001; Creeber, 2001, 2004). Yet an important distinction needs to be made in relation to the organisation of narrative and time. In soap operas, time is the basis for the organisation of the narrative, appealing to the audiences' experience of time in the real world (Geraghty, 1990: 11). By contrast, in drama series, time is subservient to the narrative and is organised according to narrative demands. In teen drama series, specifically, episodes often begin at the start of a new day (like the soap), but then go on to span anything from a few hours to a day, a week or, occasionally, longer. Moreover, the organisation of time is open to manipulation in a way that is much rarer in a soap. *Veronica Mars* is punctuated with flashbacks and features episodes that are told backwards, while *Buffy*, *Smallville* and *The O.C.* each feature episodes that take place in alternate realities.²³ This variation is important in order to counter the narrative repetition inevitable in long-running series (Geraghty, 1981: 12). However, it is significant to note that this temporal playfulness tends to occur in later seasons once the viewer is familiar with the series' norms and can comfortably cope with shifts in style and material.

²³ For example, see *Buffy* episode 617 'Normal Again', *Smallville* episode 612 'Labyrinth' and *The O.C.* episode 407 'The Chrismukk- huh?'

The generic hybridity of particular programmes further affects the organisation of time. Episodes of teen/noir hybrid *Veronica Mars*, for example, often end on cliffhangers as Veronica finds out a new piece of information relating to an ongoing mystery, echoing the conventions of the 1930s detective novel. Cliffhangers are a hallmark of the serial form (Geraghty, 1981: 13), however, in teen drama series they are used sparingly and tend to be reserved for intensely dramatic narratives, including those involving sexual violence. An overarching storyline from season four of *One Tree Hill* (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6) illustrates this aptly. In this narrative, one of the central female characters, Peyton, is stalked by a marginal male teen. At the very end of the episode (415 'Prom Night at Hater High'), she opens her front door to be confronted by her stalker. The scene fades to black and the viewer is left literally in suspense questioning: how will Peyton escape? Will her friends or boyfriend save her? Peyton remains in danger until the following episode (416 'You Call it Madness, I Call it Love'). The time elapsed between episodes here is a matter of seconds. This disruption of the genre's normal organisation of time illustrates the strength of the convention, heightening dramatic tension by erasing the usual feeling of day-to-day life that the series promotes. Many of the overarching sexual violence storylines discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 end on cliffhangers.

So far, the aspects that I have outlined are not specific to the teen drama series, but apply to television series more widely. What sets teen series apart is that, in early seasons at least, their serial structure mirrors that of the academic year of the high school and later the university.²⁴ Additionally, US seasons typically air from September to May, broadly echoing the academic year of their teenage (and younger) viewers. Pilots commonly begin with protagonists embarking on the first day of a new school year (*Dawson's Creek*) or a new school altogether (*Buffy*, *Beverly Hills*) and, similarly, new seasons begin at the start of new school years. This structure allows new characters to enter as new students start at the school, often disturbing the dynamics of existing friendships between the core group.²⁵ The academic year creates a calendar in the life of the series, marked by seasonal institutional events that reference the outside world. In US series, home-coming dances take place towards the start of seasons, proms occur towards the seasons' end and graduation ceremonies coincide with season finales. In long-running series such as *Beverly Hills* and *Smallville*, once characters have progressed beyond university, this serial structure based on the academic year largely disappears.

²⁴ It is important to note that this structure also applies to school or college-based fictional television programmes such as *Community* (NBC, 2009-) and *The Inbetweeners* (E4, 2008-).

²⁵ See, for example, Jen's arrival in *Dawson's Creek* or Rachel's arrival in season three of *One Tree Hill*.

Other seasonal events, such as Halloween and Christmas, are also marked in the appropriate month. *The O.C.* features a 'Chrismukkah' episode in December of each of its four seasons.²⁶ The time elapsed between seasons typically mirrors the school summer holiday of the young viewer, with characters recalling their summer activities when new seasons begin. This suggests that these teenagers have a life beyond the diegetic world of the series, an aspect that is frequently exploited by online marketing materials, such as characters' blogs or profiles on social networking sites.

My study of the timelines also reveals that the serial structure of teen drama series is linked to teenage characters' sexual development. Teen drama series are centrally concerned with teenage characters gradual transition between childhood and adulthood and their sexual experiences are key in marking this maturation. In this way, the programmes' serial structure parallels the normative developmental narrative of sexuality. From lingering glances signalling attraction between characters, to first dates and kisses shortly afterwards and then to the formation of monogamous, sexual relationships, series place a strong narrative emphasis on mapping the significant stages in this development. First kisses occur early on in the first season and characters tend to lose their virginity towards the end of the first or in the second seasons.²⁷ In later seasons, the narrative focuses on their subsequent sexual partners. In the case of particularly long-running programmes, such as *Beverly Hills*, *Smallville* or *One Tree Hill*, the narrative may follow characters getting married and/or becoming parents.

Notably, even in these cases, the central tension between childhood and independent adulthood is never fully resolved. Marriage and children do not signal stability but, like the soap opera, open up new sets of problems. In *One Tree Hill*, for example, teenage characters Haley and Nathan marry in season one, only to separate in season two, reunite in season three, have a baby in season four, separate again in season five and once more reunite. Sexual violence narratives play a large part in the deferral of teenage characters' entry to full adulthood. As I illustrate in the following chapter, in early seasons, episodic sexual violence narratives often operate as a warning to young female characters about the dangers of growing up too fast. Reflecting this deferral of closure, finales are often left ambiguous and open-ended. This is heightened in the case of series that were cancelled prematurely such as *Freaks and Geeks* and *My So-Called Life*.

However, while finales may be left open, their existence marks another significant distinction between soaps and series. Unlike the soap opera's sense of an endless future,

²⁶ Seth, one of the central teenagers in *The O.C.* is half Jewish and half Christian and, thus, celebrates 'Chrismukkah', a merging of Christmas and Hanukkah.

²⁷ See Brenda and Dylan's relationship in season one of *Beverly Hills*, for example.

teen drama series bear the *expectation* of resolution. Even in on-going, long-running series such as *One Tree Hill* and *Smallville*, in which the central characters have long ceased to be teenagers, there is a sense of eventual closure. This ending is not necessarily pre-conceived, but it is *expected* in a way that the ending of a soap opera such as *Neighbours* (Seven Network/Network Ten, 1985-) is not.

British series are shorter and less school-oriented than US programmes. The teenage characters are portrayed as much more independent than their US counterparts and spend less time in the school setting (I look at British series in more depth in Chapter 8). *Hex*, which takes place in a boarding school, is an obvious exception but even in this case, the protagonists, Cassie and, later, Ella, are much more frequently depicted in the adult-free and private setting of their bedroom rather than their classrooms (I will explore space further in the following section). Despite this, however, their serial structure still mirrors the school year. Season two of *Skins* ends with the teenage characters receiving their exam results and deciding what to do with their life beyond school. Season three starts again at the beginning of a school term, with a new teenage cast. Further, the timelines reveal that sexual developmental narrative structures remain important. The narrative of *Sugar Rush* follows protagonist, Kim, through a series of 'firsts', from her first same-sex crush, her first same-sex kiss, her first experience of sexual intercourse to her subsequent sexual partners, ending with her first adult romantic relationship.

The Organisation of Narrative and Space

The organisation of time and space are intricately linked. As seasons are typically structured around the academic year, the high school and later, the university, are prominent settings in teen drama series. Like the hospital in a medical drama or the office in a legal drama, the school functions as a central meeting point for the core characters and their peers. Within this space, teenage characters oscillate between adult-occupied spaces such as classrooms and offices, and spaces that are relatively adult-free, such as the corridors, cafeteria, toilets, locker rooms and grounds surrounding the school. Each setting has a particular narrative function.

Spaces that are occupied by adults as well as by teens - classrooms and offices - operate to underline the generational difference between these figures. In the pilot of *My So-Called Life*, the viewer is privy to Angela's bored voice-over as she meets with a teacher in a classroom to discuss her future. The classroom is not only a place of learning, but more commonly it is a place for teenagers to daydream while gazing at their love interest. In turn, teachers' offices are often spaces for serious discussions about the

teenager's academic progress. Depending on the particular programme and the relationship between the adult and teen in question, these discussions are framed differently. In *Skins* and *Freaks and Geeks*, both series that heavily emphasise comedy, meetings between teenagers and guidance counselors function largely as comic relief, while in *One Tree Hill* meetings between teenage characters and their sports' coach, Whitey, are portrayed as sentimental heart-to-hearts.

With the exception of one or two wise teachers (such as Whitey), adults are typically portrayed as ineffectual at policing teenage behaviour in the rest of the school, in which the teenager is most commonly portrayed. Each series has a private space in the school where the teenagers can speak more freely about personal matters without fear of being over-heard or reprimanded by teachers. (See, for example, the girls' toilets in *My So-Called Life*, underneath the bleachers in *Freaks and Geeks* or the newspaper office in *Smallville*). However, the corridors and the cafeteria are often the most prominent settings in the high school and are governed by a diegetic hierarchy of popularity. Significantly, these are public spaces and they serve as an arena for the performance of heteronormative social roles. The corridor is a space for cementing or fragmenting romantic relationships. Veronica Mars is unceremoniously dumped by her boyfriend in this space (101 'Pilot'), while a particularly memorable moment in Angela and Jordan's relationship in *My So-Called Life* occurs when he finally publicly acknowledges her as his girlfriend and a long-shot captures them walking down the corridor together hand-in-hand (112 'Self-Esteem').

The corridor is densely populated by students, meaning that rumours, including those involving the sexual reputations of particular teenage characters, spread quickly and efficiently. As I explore further in Chapter 6, homophobic abuse narratives take place in this setting and the narrative emphasises the public nature of this violence, with anonymous students crowding around the edge of frames, looking on. This abuse is always verbal and/or visual (taking the form of homophobic graffiti, for example, scrawled across a locker door). While physical violence does occur within the school setting, it is rarely sexual in nature.

The timelines reveal that in later seasons (usually the fourth or fifth), the dominant setting shifts from the high school to the college campus (see *Beverly Hills*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* for examples). This setting is similarly divided into adult-occupied and adult-free spaces, such as the classroom, cafeteria and campus grounds, which hold similar functions. The key addition is the dorm room, which allows new characters to be introduced as room mates (for example, Audrey in season five of *Dawson's Creek* or Piz and Parker in season three of *Veronica Mars*). This also adds a sexual dimension to the space, as, with the absence of parental supervision, characters can

invite lovers to spend the night. Buffy and Jen in *Dawson's Creek* both have sex with their boyfriends in dorm rooms. The university is a less rigidly gendered/heteronormative space than the high school, with room for experimentation with personal and social identities. It is in this space that Willow in *Buffy* cements her love of witchcraft and, in *Dawson's Creek*, Jen establishes her own feminist radio show. Both season four of *Buffy* and season three of *Veronica Mars* open with scenes of politicised feminist rallies as the heroines navigate the college campus.

At the same time, the timelines reveal that the university is a much more physically and sexually dangerous space than the high school, arguably because of the lack of a protective adult presence. Unlike the school, which is rarely ever the site of physical sexual violence, *Veronica Mars* and *Beverly Hills* both feature rape narratives that take place on the university campus. In the following chapter I also identify and discuss an episodic sexual violence narrative that occurs when Peyton goes to a fraternity party in *One Tree Hill* (108 'The Search for Something More').²⁸

Along with the school or college, the other dominant setting in the genre is the protagonist's middle-class family home. Episodes often begin with an establishing shot of this setting, followed by an interior shot. The pre-credit sequences of early episodes of *Dawson's Creek*, for example, begin with Dawson and Joey watching and discussing films in his bedroom, while episodes of *The O.C.* often start with the Cohen family and Ryan eating a hurried breakfast. In early seasons, this space is privileged more than any of the other characters' homes, although these do become more prominent as series continue. Episodes of season three of *Dawson's Creek*, for example, shift away from Dawson's home to the homes of the other core teenage characters.

Again, this setting is broken down into spaces that are adult-occupied or adult-free. The kitchen, lounge and dining room are family spaces. This is where interactions between teenagers and their parents take place, such as asking for advice, arguing or hugging. The teenager's bedroom is a space for socialising with friends, but more commonly for soul-searching while lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling and listening to romantic pop songs (Lury, 2002: 18). *Veronica Mars* parodies this norm when, in an attempt to make her father believe she has split up with her boyfriend, Veronica locks herself in her room and plays languid songs, including the *Dawson's Creek* theme tune, on repeat (211 'Donut Run'). The *mise-en-scene* in this space is also significant in communicating the personal taste of particular characters. In *One Tree Hill*, Peyton's bedroom walls are lined with records, foreshadowing her later career as a music producer, while Dawson's bedroom in *Dawson's*

²⁸ For a similar example, see also *Buffy* 205 'Reptile Boy'.

Creek is littered with cinematic paraphernalia, establishing him as a cinefile. The family home remains a key setting even in later seasons. Once teenagers have graduated high school, they often attend the local university and remain living at home (see *Buffy*, *Veronica Mars* and *Gossip Girl* for examples). In season five, *Dawson's Creek* shifts location from Capeside to Boston, but again the family home remains central when Jen's grandmother decides to move to Boston as well. The core group of friends continue to meet for family dinners at her new home.

The middle-class family home is inextricably linked to depictions of teenage sexuality. The narrative of teen drama series follows teenage characters as they negotiate the liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. Episodes often feature these characters testing their boundaries by trying to assert their independence. This is manifested in storylines in which teenage characters have wild house parties, lie to their parents, drink alcohol and/or take drugs. In these narratives, events then spiral out of the teenager's control and they learn an important lesson about trying to grow up too fast. This lesson will inevitably be forgotten in subsequent episodes, but many episodes in early seasons end with the protagonist apologising to and hugging their mother or father within the family home, reinforcing this setting as a space of safety. For example, as Byers (1998) notes, despite their troubled relationship, a surprising number of *My So-Called Life* episodes end with Angela in her mother's arms (2007: 26). The same is true of early episodes of *Beverly Hills*, which often end with one of the teenage twins hugging their parents in the living room (see episode 111 'B.Y.O.B' for an example).

The safety of the family home is significant in relation to teenage characters' sexual development, allowing them to mature at their own pace. Significantly, though, different rules apply for male and female teenagers. Season one of *Beverly Hills* offers a particularly useful example here through the different sexual experiences of the series' twin protagonists, Brenda and Brandon Walsh.²⁹ Brandon loses his virginity in his bedroom to a non-recurring character in the fourth episode of the first season, while his parents are in the house. Although the episode features a scene in which his mother expresses her concern, she makes no attempt to stop him and, notably, her concern is for the girl rather than her son. In contrast, Brenda's sexuality is much more heavily policed by her parents. When she does finally lose her virginity, in the context of a long-term monogamous relationship, she does so in the more neutral space of a hotel room without her parents' knowledge.

The relationship between the character's family home and their sexuality is reinforced by characters from unstable or abusive families. These characters tend to come

²⁹ In later series, the programme focuses more on the ensemble cast and Brenda leaves.

from class extremes, either from upper-class (Dylan in *Beverly Hills*, Logan in *Veronica Mars*) or working-class backgrounds (Ryan in *The O.C.*, Rayanne in *My So-Called Life*, Kim in *Freaks and Geeks*, Tyra in *Friday Night Lights*). With heightened independence and less adult supervision, these characters are depicted as highly sexually experienced. Having said that, the timelines actually reveal that, despite frequent verbal allusions to their heightened sexual experience, these characters' sexual encounters are rarely depicted onscreen. Notably, as I discuss in Chapter 8, in British series, regardless of class and family background, teenage characters are portrayed as much more independent than their US counterparts. As such, they regularly masturbate or have sex in their bedrooms while their parents are in the house. Further, British series are subject to much looser censorship laws than their US counterparts and, thus, these sexual representations are much more explicit. In both British and US series, there is also a link between teenage characters' family backgrounds and sexual violence. In the pilot of *My So-Called Life*, Rayanne is sexually assaulted in a carpark and it is suggested that one of the causes of this is her mother's neglect (see Chapter 5). Female victims of sexual violence - Effy in *Skins*, Sugar in *Sugar Rush*, Tyra in *Friday Night Lights* - tend to come from dysfunctional homes with little parental support and this heightened sexual independence is often framed as an indirect cause of this abuse.

Despite these connections between family backgrounds and teenage sexuality, the home is rarely the site for sexual violence. Instead, these narratives tend to take place in deserted, unfamiliar, often outdoors, settings at night, such as hotel rooftops (*Gossip Girl*, *Veronica Mars*), beaches (*The O.C.*), car parks (*Friday Night Lights*, *My So-Called Life*) or unfamiliar house-parties (*Veronica Mars*, *One Tree Hill*). This makes it all the more dramatic and poignant in the rare cases when sexual violence *does* take place in the home. *One Tree Hill* and *Buffy* both feature attempted rapes that take place in the home (I discuss these storylines further in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively). In both cases, however, this familiar setting is rendered strange by the use of unusual camerawork and editing techniques.

In contemporary series, with the widespread use of the Internet and mobile technology, storylines of sexual violence can take place in the family home (usually the teenager's bedroom) in ways that they rarely did in teen series from the 1990s.³⁰ In *One Tree Hill*, Peyton is stalked online by a male teenager pretending to be her half-brother (see Chapter 6). This example indicates the increasing blurring of boundaries between private

³⁰ The key exception here is a narrative from season seven of *Beverly Hills*, which aired in 1997, in which central female, Donna, receives obscene phone calls at her apartment (715 'Phantom of C.U.').

and public. Yet, notably, Peyton comes from a dysfunctional family and largely lives alone as her father works on oil rigs. As such, the sanctity of the middle-class family home remains untroubled.

A final recurring generic setting is the space where teenage characters meet to socialise. These can be spaces that are partially occupied by adults, such as cafes and diners, or exclusively teenage spaces such as nightclubs. Cafes and diners are portrayed as safe, friendly spaces where teenagers meet to gossip and, occasionally, to seek adult advice on problems from an owner or employee (Nat in *Beverly Hills* or Karen in *One Tree Hill*). Nightclubs are much more edgy, dangerous settings and their appeal to a youthful generation is particularly pronounced, often by the use of live music. *The O.C.*, *Buffly* and *One Tree Hill* all prominently feature clubs in which contemporary, live, predominantly indie bands play. The Bronze in *Buffly* is often over-run by vampires, while even in non-supernatural series like *The O.C.*, the nightclub is the site of a shooting (224 'The Dearly Beloved'). That said, again sexual violence narratives rarely occur in this space. These social spaces are public, crowded settings and, as I stated before, sexual violence tends to occur in deserted areas with the editing heightening the spatial distance between the victim and her friends.³¹ When sexual violence does occur in one of these social settings, it either occurs after hours when customers have gone home or outside. For example, in *Smallville* Lana is attacked in the local café while she is preparing to lock up and go home (219 'Precipice'), and Cassie in *Hex* is sexually assaulted outside the local club (101 'Pilot').

The genre's use of limited geographical space, focusing predominantly on the three main settings of the school/university, family home and social space, is important for establishing a stable community of characters who meet and interact regularly. Teen dramas are also often set in relatively small towns or suburban neighbourhoods (see *Dawson's Creek*, *One Tree Hill*, *Buffly*, *Smallville*, *Hex*, *Friday Night Lights*), heightening opportunities for this interaction. *Smallville* and *Friday Night Lights* both feature events that gather the whole town together. The significance of these settings is reflected in the title of series such as *One Tree Hill*, *Dawson's Creek* and *Smallville*.³² Further, these spaces, particularly the high school, social setting and teenager's bedroom, operate to mark this community as distinctly youthful. While adults are often prominent in these series,

³¹ A notable exception is homophobic abuse narratives, which as I discuss in Chapter 6, take place in crowded school corridors.

³² Even those series that take place in large cities, such as *Gossip Girl* and *Beverly Hills*, still focus on a relatively static group of friends and fairly limited geographical spaces. *Beverly Hills*, for example, uses establishing shots of famous locales in the city, but the teenagers tend to be depicted in the same small number of interior locations.

they inhabit different spaces. In the following section I will focus on the teen community in more detail.

Characters and Relationships

This emphasis on a fixed group of characters is not unique to teen drama series, but extends to other fictional television narratives too. What sets teen dramas apart, however, is that this is a community based on *generation* rather than location (*Neighbours*, *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004 -)) or family (*Brothers and Sisters* (ABC, 2006-)). As teen drama series deal with teenage characters' gradual transition from childhood to adulthood, characterisation and, specifically, character development are key themes. This is reflected in programme titles, many of which take their name from central characters or character types (see *Dawson's Creek*, *Veronica Mars*, *Buffy*, *Sugar Rush*, *Freaks and Geeks*). As Thompson observes, 'In soap operas and long-running series, we can see characters age and develop both physically and narratively in a way that even Wagner's longest operas or Dickens' most extended novels didn't allow' (1996: 32). Although Thompson is making an argument here for quality television, his observation is particularly apt to apply to teen drama series. In these programmes, the aging and development of characters is even more pronounced because this genre is centrally concerned with the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. In the case of series that feature embodied teenage actors, the viewer is able to see them *physically* age onscreen.

As teen drama series focus on a youthful community bound by their generation, unlike the soap opera, there is little diversity in terms of age. Series feature a core ensemble group of teenagers, often consisting of an individual protagonist and their friends, as well as their classmates. Particular episodes may feature other students from their school or local teenagers, yet the narrative usually remains firmly fixed on the core group, who comprise a relatively closed unit. Even in series which progress from high school to university as the teenage characters age, this central group tends to remain static with the departure and/or addition of only one or two new recurring characters. This group also tends to lack diversity in terms of race. Series usually have an individual protagonist who is white, heterosexual and middle-class. The only exception across the fourteen series that I examine is *Sugar Rush*, which is fronted by a white, middle-class lesbian. (I explore the reasons for this in Chapter 8).

As Geraghty notes in relation to the soap opera, with a large number of characters, characterisation must be swift and sharp (1981: 19). While teen dramas have fewer characters than soaps, the need for swift characterisation is equally vital. Because these

characters are all the same age (and usually also the same ethnicity and race) and face the same types of difficulties in their transition to adulthood, programmes need to be able to differentiate between them quickly. To do this, programmes often draw on broad stereotypes such as the geek, the cheerleader, the jock and the rebel. Notably, these are US constructs. British series do not feature cheerleaders and jocks. However, they do feature characters that function in broadly similar ways such as the popular one (Michelle and Tony in *Skins*), the studious one (Cassie in *Hex*, Jal in *Skins*) and the rebel (Sugar in *Sugar Rush*, Thelma in *Hex*).

In her analysis of British soap operas, Geraghty groups the narrative function of characters together in three main ways: the individuated type; the serial type and the holder of position (1981: 19). These categories are not mutually exclusive and overlap in significant ways. The individuated type is marked by traits that are uniquely their own, giving a sense that the programme offers a rich variety of characters. In relation to the teen drama series, an example could be Cassie's kookiness in *Skins* or Chuck's arrogance in *Gossip Girl*. The serial type relies on intertextuality between members of the same genre for its meaning. For example, the geek is defined as shy, diegetically unpopular, studious, socially inept, (sexually) immature and often unfashionable. This type is recognisable in Mouth in early seasons of *One Tree Hill*, Willow in early seasons of *Buffy* and Brian in *My So-Called Life*. Other characters are defined against this type. For example, in *My So-Called Life* Jordan is the antithesis to Brian: he is relatively confident, sexually experienced, popular, struggles academically and is fashionable.

The third way that Geraghty groups characters is in relation to their status position or social role, for example, their profession, marital status, age or sex. This category applies less to the teen drama series than the others, as in these series, all of the teenage characters are the same age, start out as unmarried and usually have no profession. This means that almost all narratives are available to almost all characters, centring around general problems in relationships whether friendships, romantic or familial. Variety to these plots is enabled by using different characters. These general plots are mixed with specific plots that are more rigid in their use of characters. For example, narratives involving the music industry in *One Tree Hill* are limited to Haley, Peyton and/or Mia. Each episode typically features two or three interweaving storylines that involve different members of the central group, blending serious, dramatic narratives with those that are more comic and offering multiple points of identification. As such, the narrative importance of protagonists should not be over-estimated. *One Tree Hill* continues even after the departure of its original protagonist, Lucas.

This decentring of identification is rarely recognised in feminist television scholarship of teen drama series, which tends to focus on young female viewers and presumes that they identify only with the heroine of female-fronted texts. This work typically looks at the heroine in isolation, focusing on her individual character traits and, thus, it is ill-suited to say anything broader about issues of genre or gender relations. In contrast, a structuralist approach emphasises binaries and textual relations, arguing that every element derives its meaning from its relationship to other categories in the same system (Seiter, 1992: 50).

Thus, in this section I want to move way from focusing on the specifics of who characters are as individuals to think more generally and generically about what these social roles are, what they *do*. For this reason, I turn to Propp's (1928/1968) analysis of Russian folktales. In the previous chapter, I outlined Propp's argument that these folktales follow identical narrative structures. However, Propp also looked at characters in these tales, mapping the dominant, recurring character roles across this genre (1928/68: 79-80):

Character Role	Sphere of Action
1. Villain	Villainy, fighting, action
2. Donor (provider)	Giving magical agent or helper
3. Helper	Moves the hero, makes good a lack, rescues from pursuit, solves difficult tasks, transforms the hero
4. The princess and her father	A sought-for person: assigns difficult tasks, brands, exposes, recognises, punishes

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 5. The dispatcher | Sends hero on quest/mission |
| 6. The hero (seeker or victim) | Departs on search, reacts to donor,

attempts difficult tasks, marriage |
| 7. The false hero | Unfounded claims to hero's sphere of

action |

It may seem at first glance that these roles hold little relevance to the teen drama series - there is no obvious 'princess' in these texts. However, when looked at more closely, the roles do begin to make sense. To take *Buffy* as an example, the villains are most obviously the vampires and demons that she fights each week, including recurring vampire, Spike. The donor is Buffy's calling as slayer - her special powers that render her abnormally physically strong. The helper role is most commonly performed by her best friends, Willow and Xander, her initial love interest, Angel and her Watcher, Giles, each of whom play significant roles in helping her defeat her demon foes. The princess in this case could refer to the victim of the demons - this role could be occupied by Buffy, her friends, Giles, Spike, Angel or any number of short-term characters. The dispatcher is most commonly Giles. The hero (or heroine, in this case) is almost always Buffy, although it could also be her friends in particular episodes. The false hero could refer to Faith, another slayer who is envious of Buffy's life and power.

Yet, as Fiske notes, 'different individual characters may perform the function (or character role) of villain at different times in the same narrative' (1987: 137). Thus, in *Buffy*, sometimes her friends assume the role of villain (usually while under a spell). The finale of season six offers a particularly striking example when Willow, possessed by magic and grief at her girlfriend's death, almost destroys the world. Similarly, in later seasons, the vampire, Spike, assumes the helper, victim and hero roles at various points. Notably, there are differing degrees of emphasis with each role. In *Buffy*, the villain may be a life-threatening demon, witch or vampire, but, in early seasons, it may also be Cordelia, a catty cheerleader who later assumes the role of victim and helper. In this case, Cordelia's villainy functions mainly as comic relief, creating a space for witty, verbal sparring

between her and Buffy. One of the failures of the role model emphasis of much teen and feminist television scholarship is that it is unable to account for these ambiguities. Buffy is often praised for her independence and strength, yet the rigidity of the analysis is often unable to accommodate character complexity. She may be independent, but she also often assumes the role of victim, needing to be saved by her friends, lovers or Giles.

As a supernatural series with an obvious heroine and victim-to-be-saved each week as well as a strong presence of magic, *Buffy* arguably conforms more easily to Propp's character roles than a series such as *Dawson's Creek* or *Friday Night Lights*. Indeed, as aforementioned in Chapter 3, when testing Propp's structure for himself, Fiske uses an episode of another supernatural series, *Bionic Woman*, and notes a neat fit (1987: 137-8). However, these broad roles can be applied across the genre more widely. The donor, dispatcher and false hero roles are harder to ascribe, but all series tend to have characters that occupy villain, helper, victim and/or hero roles at one point or another. The villain is most commonly a diegetically popular character who bullies the protagonist and their friends, or a cruel teacher who picks on their students in class. The helper role is occupied by the protagonist and their friends, parents and love interest. The 'princess' or victim role may be occupied by any of the characters who has a problem in that particular episode or narrative. The hero/ine is usually the protagonist, but can also be their friends, love interest or parents. In the case of sexual violence narratives specifically, the villain is typically a short-term male character who often remains nameless and has little back story. The victim role is commonly occupied by a central female character, who can be the heroine or her friend. The helper tends to be the victim's female friends or love interest and the hero is usually the victim's lover or else potential love interest. I discuss this further in the following analysis chapters.

Again, it is important to note that these roles are fluid. Some of the most poignant moments in series come when a character acts out of their character role or type. In an episode of *Freaks and Geeks* (104 'Kim Kelly Is My Friend'), protagonist Lindsay goes to her classmate, Kim's, house for dinner. Up until this point, Kim has occupied the role of villain, mocking Lindsay and bullying her younger brother, Sam. An insight into her neglectful and abusive family life, however, renders Kim more complex and she moves beyond the villain role to occupy the roles of helper and victim. As Geraghty notes, albeit in relation to the soap opera, 'Such moments are brief but offer the regular viewer a different facet to a familiar character which can be drawn on in future episodes' (1981: 16).

In teen drama series, there are a range of identifiable character types, made recognizable through their relationships with other characters and the function that individuals adopt in particular episodes, series and across the genre more widely. What is

particularly striking about teen series is the relative fluidity of these character functions, even at apparent extremes. It is not uncommon for a teenage villain to later become a victim and, in the process, be rendered more sympathetic as is the case with Kim in *Freaks and Geeks*. Chuck Bass, a central male character in *Gossip Girl*, provides another apt example. In the pilot of the series, he sexually assaults two central female characters (see Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion). Yet, later in the first season he is rendered sympathetic when he falls in love.³³ This fluidity is more pronounced in relation to *teenage* characters. Adults can change roles – Julie Cooper, the resident villainess in *The O.C.*, for example, shifts from being a callous, self-obsessed gold-digger to a sensitive and caring mother over the programme's four seasons – but this much rarer. For example, in *One Tree Hill*, it is particularly difficult for Lucas' father, Dan, to transcend his villain role due to viewers' knowledge that he murdered his brother, a popular character both diegetically and non-diegetically, in season three.

Sexual Narratives

While almost all teenage characters are available for almost all romance plots, their type affects the way that sexual narratives unfold. This is illustrated by Byers (1998) in her insightful analysis of representations of gender and sexuality in *My So-Called Life*. Her article stems from a realist reading of character, beginning with a discussion of the series' heroine, Angela, as 'an accurate representation of one reality of contemporary girlhood' (2007: 13). However, she then moves on to adopt a structuralist approach, mapping patterns across the series' representations of gendered sexuality in order to expose and critique the hegemonic ideology that lies beneath 'even the most progressive programming' (31). She also pays close attention to how race and class intersect with these constructions.

Byers argues that each of the teenage characters in the programme, 'has a sexuality rooted in a stereotype' and that 'these stereotypes are strongly linked to notions of gender-appropriate sexuality' (22). She produces an appendix mapping these gendered sexualities in relation to each character (31). The three central female characters assume the roles of 'innocence' (Angela, who remains a virgin throughout the series), 'promiscuity' (Rayanne, Angela's best friend, who is highly sexually experienced) and 'conformity' (Sharon,

³³ Falling in love is often used as a catalyst in television fiction more widely to render villainous characters more sympathetic. See Paul Robinson's (Stefan Dennis) transformation upon falling in love with Rebecca Napier (Jane Hall) in *Neighbours* or Barney Stinson's (Neil Patrick Harris) transformation upon falling in love with Robin (Cobie Smulders) in *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005-).

Angela's former best friend who assumes an 'It's okay if you love him' attitude towards sex). The males occupy the roles of 'traditional masculinity' (Jordan, Angela's on/off love interest, who is highly sexually experienced), 'deviance' (Rickie, Rayanne's gay best friend) and 'immaturity' (Brian, Angela's sexually inexperienced neighbour). It is Byers' contention that, 'In this construction, the binary positioning of feminine and masculine sexualities is one wherein the feminine is ever the less powerful, the less sexual, the less free to choose, the one with the most to lose' (22). Male sexuality is portrayed as active, fluid and complex, whereas, 'the girls can only choose between saying yes and no, knowing that to say no in this text is to forgo agency and to say yes almost always leads to loss' (22).

In her appendix, Byers not only maps each character's sexual identity, but also connects this to other aspects of their characterisation, such as their race, ethnicity, costume and appearance. As such, the identities that she ascribes to each teenager are so precise that they are ill-suited to apply to other programmes. It is also important to note that *My So-Called Life* differs from other teen series in that it was cancelled after just one season. Thus, the teenage characters' sexual identities are arguably more fixed than in longer-running series. Angela does not lose her virginity and, thus, she does not move beyond the 'innocent' role. However, the sexual roles that Byers identifies in relation to *My So-Called Life* are relevant to other series. While in longer-running programmes, characters are able to transcend individual roles, the *range* of roles available to them remains the same. The starting point for most central female characters is the 'innocent', before they then move on to the 'conformist' by entering heterosexual, monogamous, romantic relationships.³⁴ Alternatively, female characters may move from the 'promiscuous' role to the 'conformist'.³⁵ Less commonly, female characters move from the 'conformist' to 'promiscuity'.³⁶ Notably, this particular trajectory is not portrayed as a desirable choice, as I will go on to discuss.

The dominance of constructions of gendered sexuality is reflected by narratives surrounding characters losing their virginity. With few exceptions, if they have not already lost their virginity before the diegetic world of the series begins, male characters tend to do so early on the first season.³⁷ These narratives tend to be episodic and, as such, there is

³⁴ For examples, see Buffy, Joey in *Dawson's Creek*, Brenda in *Beverly Hills*, Blair in *Gossip Girl*, Julie in *Friday Night Lights*, Summer in *The O.C.*

³⁵ See Jen in *Dawson's Creek*, Serena in *Gossip Girl*, Tyra in *Friday Night Lights*.

³⁶ See Marissa in season three of *The O.C.* or Michelle in season two of *Skins*, for examples.

³⁷ The key exceptions here are Clark in *Smallville* and Dawson in *Dawson's Creek*, both of whom lose their virginities in season five (see Appendix B).

very little emphasis on the lead up to or aftermath of this sexual encounter. There is no sense that males need to be emotionally ‘ready’ to have sex. Instead they are portrayed as ever-ready and willing, regardless of who their sexual partner is, replicating the dominant stereotype that male sexuality is natural, unstoppable and somehow detached from the male in question. Moreover, it is not uncommon for central male characters to verbally pressurise their girlfriends into having sex.³⁸ This behaviour is not framed as sexual violence by these programmes or diegetically by the characters involved, but rather as an expression of normative heterosexual relations, resonating with MacKinnon’s argument discussed in Chapter 2 that hegemonic constructions of heterosexuality underpin gender inequality (1982: 185).

The notion of male sexuality as natural is reinforced by the permissive attitude of parents towards their son having sex. In the previous section, I cited the example of Brandon in *Beverly Hills* losing his virginity in his family home. Another example that illustrates this relaxed attitude is offered by an episode of *The O.C.* (119 ‘The Heartbreak’), in which Seth and his father, Sandy, discuss the aftermath of Seth losing his virginity and, specifically, Seth’s concerns about his performance:

SANDY: Just because you’re ready to go, it doesn’t mean she is.

SETH: I’m always ready to go.

SANDY: [proudly] Well, you’re my son. We Cohens are very sexual beings.

SETH: Oh my god.

SANDY: Virile! Get used to it.

SETH: [mutters] This is disgusting. Foreplay, huh?

SANDY: I’m telling you. The appetiser is as good as the main course.

SETH: Oh, just swallowed a little bit of throw up. Wow. I’m going to pretend we never had this conversation, but...thanks dad.

³⁸ For examples of pressurised sexuality, see the relationships of Jordan and Angela in *My So-Called Life*, Dylan and Brenda in season one of *Beverly Hills* and Nathan and Haley in season one of *One Tree Hill*.

Notably, this conversation is framed as a comedic moment in the series.³⁹ Sandy is portrayed as unconcerned and proud of his son, implying that, for a male, losing their virginity is a natural rite of passage.

It is also significant here that Seth's talk with his father emphasises the *practical* aspects of sexual performance. In contrast, female teenagers frequently emphasise the more emotional aspects of sex, such as concerns about being fully psychologically ready to lose their virginity, their fear of seeming sexually immature to the male in question and their worries about becoming pregnant. Great emphasis is placed on the importance of being 'ready' for sex, choosing the right partner (someone who will respect them) and having sex for the right reasons. If these conditions are not met, it is suggested that it will be psychologically damaging and certainly not pleasurable, reinforcing Byers' argument about the 'innocence' of female teenage characters and suggesting that their sexual vulnerability is a central theme in these programmes. This gendered distinction is reflected in the different narrative weights that are placed on male and female characters losing their virginity. In *Beverly Hills*, Brandon's loss-of-virginity narrative is relegated to one episode. By contrast, his twin sister, Brenda, only loses her virginity after much soul-searching and several conversations with her female friends, which span multiple episodes.

Even when all these conditions are met, female characters often face negative consequences for engaging in sexual activity. An interview with the creators of *Beverly Hills* illustrates this gendered bias (Itzkoff, 2008). The programme's writer and creator, Darren Star, discusses the pressure he came under from the Fox network affiliates for presenting Brenda's loss of virginity to her boyfriend, Dylan, in a positive light. He explains, 'The affiliates were scandalised- not because they had sex, but because Brenda was happy about it, and it didn't have any dire consequences' (Itzkoff, 2008). As a result, Star was strongly advised to write an episode that would address these consequences. Indicating the narrative weight placed on these types of narratives, Brenda faces a pregnancy scare in the season one finale and in season two, the couple breaks up. It would be wrong to assume that these storylines are always in the interest of educating teenage viewers about the perils of sex as they could equally serve to enhance dramatic tension by creating cliffhangers which often occur at season finales. Yet, it is interesting that these narrative questions centre very much around the female character and frames pregnancy as her problem, replicating the traditional notion that heterosexual intercourse is a woman's responsibility and perpetuating the stereotype of male sexuality as something that men cannot control. This is illustrated aptly by an episode of *Dawson's Creek*, in which Joey

³⁹ It is labelled on Youtube as 'The O.C. Funny : Seth and Sandy Cohen Have "THE TALK"'. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAZbZJE5FOY> [accessed 10 Feb 2010].

fears she may be pregnant by her boyfriend, Pacey (419 'Late'). Unusually for the series as a whole, Pacey is almost entirely absent from this episode, which focuses instead on Joey's reaction throughout. Again, this resonates with Byers' argument that female teenagers face much more negative repercussions from engaging in sexual activity than males.

This notion of females as having more to lose is reflected by narratives concerning teenage characters' sexual reputations. In these storylines females face much more negative consequences from sexual rumours than males. An episode from *Veronica Mars* (108 'Like a Virgin') offers an example of the gendered double standard surrounding teenage sexuality. In this episode, a purity test is circulated around the high school; the lower the teenager's score, the less 'pure', or more sexually experienced, they are. In the case of Veronica's friend, Meg, the results of her test are falsified and then published online. As a result of her low score, she faces verbal harassment from her classmates and is ostracised by her friends. In contrast, when males score low on the test, it is a source of pride and garners them a higher social standing.

The gendered differences surrounding the representation of teenage sexuality extends to other sexual narratives including one night stands and infidelity. When female characters engage in one night stands, it rarely has much to do with active desire. Rather, these encounters occur because she is drunk, unhappy, lonely or tricked into thinking the sex could lead to something more.⁴⁰ The emotional aftermath of this experience tends to transcend the episode in which the sexual encounter takes place. While the negative aftermaths of these sexual narratives could be partially attributed to the moralising aims of many teen drama series, it is significant to note that male teenage characters tend to have much more positive experiences of one night stands. Reflecting the greater degree of sexual freedom afforded to males by patriarchal society, one night stands involving male teenage characters are not much of a story. They tend to be depicted with far less negative consequences and largely take place because of active, male sexual desire which is presented as uncontrollable and in need of release.⁴¹ This gendered inequality between representations of casual sex, which is embedded in the narrative organisation and characterisation, indicates a difficulty and reluctance to depict female sexual desire as active and potentially pleasurable.

Narratives about sexual infidelity overlap considerably with those about one night stands. Males face less negative consequences when they cheat on a partner and tend to be forgiven more quickly. For example, in *My So-Called Life*, Jordan cheats on Angela with

⁴⁰ For examples, see *Dawson's Creek* episode 207 'The All-Nighter' and *Buffy* episode 403 'The Harsh Light of Day'.

⁴¹ For an example, see *Skins* episode 206 'Tony'.

her best friend, Rayanne, and is forgiven relatively quickly. As Byers explains, the assumption here is that ‘male heterosexuality, even irresponsible male heterosexuality, is perfectly acceptable at any age’ (2007: 23- 4). By contrast, females who cheat face much more serious repercussions as indicated by the title of a *Friday Night Lights* episode, ‘It’s Different For Girls’, dealing with infidelity. Lyla, the girl who has cheated on her boyfriend, is ostracised by her female peers and faces extensive verbal bullying. In contrast, the boy she has cheated with (her boyfriend’s best friend) remains relatively unscathed. It seems that, regardless of who is in a relationship and who has actually cheated, it is overwhelmingly the girl who is blamed, again reflecting the dominant societal belief that females have more control over their sexual desire and urges than males and are, therefore, held more responsible for their actions.

British teen drama series appear to be much more liberal about representations of teenage sex as illustrated by the types of sexual narratives that occur in British as compared to US family homes. Teenage characters have many more sexual partners and as seasons are typically half the length of US seasons, these sexual narratives are highly concentrated (see Appendix B). However, the types of relationships depicted and the way that these narratives are framed tend to be similar to US programmes. Teenage friendships and romantic relationships are emphasised and sexual encounters that take place within the context of monogamous rather than casual relationships tend to be prioritised in both US and British programmes. Even *Skins* which purports to eschew all sense of morality, featuring teenage characters drinking alcohol and taking recreational drugs without negative consequences, is conservative when it comes to representations of sexual relationships. I explore this further in Chapter 8.

While there are some differences between how certain sexual storylines are depicted in US and British series, gendered sexual inequalities transcend national context. In US programmes, if a pregnancy scare turns out to be real, then the female teenager tends to have the baby. The issue of abortion may be very briefly entertained, but it is rarely seriously considered. In contrast, pregnant female teenagers in British programmes are much more likely to have abortions.⁴² Yet, while the aftermath of pregnancy is treated differently, in both US and British series pregnancy is framed as an especially female concern. Whether the female in question has an abortion or has the baby, there is a strong sense that teenage males cannot be relied on to offer support. Instead, it is to female friends that the pregnant teenager turns to help her through the often traumatic situation.

⁴² See Jal in season two of *Skins* and Cassie in season one of *Hex*.

The gendered construction of sexualities identified by Byers in relation to *My So-Called Life* largely holds true for representations of teenage sexualities across the genre more widely. In these constructions, male sexuality is portrayed as more fluid, open, powerful and active than female sexuality, which tends to be depicted as devoid of sexual desire. This patterning is reinforced by the genre's dominant sexual narratives, in which female characters face much more negative consequences for engaging in sexual activity than males. These gendered distinctions will have important ramifications for depictions of sexual violence, as I will explore in the following analysis chapters.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish a broad generic and sexual context into which I will situate my subsequent analysis chapters. I have discussed teen drama series in relation to television series more widely, while also taking into account their specifically 'teen' elements. Outlining the formal narrative strategies of teen drama series in relation to their organisation of time and space, as well as highlighting the character roles, relationships and sexual narratives that this genre privileges, enables me to discern how genre and medium specificity intersect with sexual violence narratives in the following chapters.

Structural analysis of representations of teenage sexuality across the genre reveals significant differences in how male and female sexualities are portrayed. This, in turn, will have important implications for the portrayal of sexual violence. Heterosexual male sexuality is dominantly portrayed as an inevitable part of growing up, associated with freedom, choice and agency. This depiction of male sexuality as uncontrollable suggests that in some ways male teenagers are sexually passive, as reflected in sociological work on teenage sexuality which conceives of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the sexual content that males watch on television and how they subsequently behave. By presenting sexuality as out-with the male teenager's control, all sense of culpability for their actions is removed which will, in turn, have serious ramifications for the genre's depictions of sexual violence. This representation operates to obscure the relationship between constructions of gendered sexuality and power, thereby allowing questions about how these constructions contribute to sexual violence to disappear.

In contrast to the genre's representation of male sexuality as uncontrollable, female teenage characters are, paradoxically, depicted as simultaneously sexually passive and active. On the one hand, the genre displays a reluctance to depict active female sexual desire out-with the context of monogamous, romantic relationships. On the other hand, in

both US and British programmes, female teenage characters are held much more accountable for their sexual actions than males, suggesting that they are more active. If a female character is perceived as more sexually responsible than a male, this also potentially has serious consequences for depictions of sexual violence. In the following chapters, I will explore this relationship between the genre's depictions of gendered teenage sexuality and sexual violence further, starting with an analysis of episodic sexual violence narratives in US programmes.

Chapter 5

Personal Problems and Women's Issues: Episodic sexual violence narratives in US teen drama series

Introduction

The narrative timelines discussed in Chapter 3 reveal that the most common form of sexual violence storyline in US teen drama series is the self-contained episode. In these narratives, the sexual violence storyline is introduced, explored and 'resolved' all within the episode's timeslot, without extending into subsequent instalments. It is these episodic narratives that this chapter is concerned with, considering the kinds of stories about sexual violence that emerge (or not) within this context. As I discuss in Chapter 2, episodic narratives that deal with social issues (such as sexual violence) have been widely derided by teen television scholars for failing to deal with issues in sufficient complexity. This argument is often employed in the service of elevating texts that avoid this format (see Wilcox, 1999; Bavidge, 2004; Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008 for examples), yet there remains little work that looks at these social issue episodes in any detail.⁴³

Where episodic 'problem-of-the-week' narratives have been discussed is in relation to televisual depictions of sexual violence (Cuklanz, 2000; Projansky, 2001; Moorti, 2002). However, this work has tended to look at episodes divorced from series' and generic frameworks and, further, the teen drama series has remained under-explored. In this chapter I develop upon this work, situating episodic sexual violence narratives in relation to their wider series' and generic contexts. This contextualisation acts as a starting point for a deeper analysis of how sexual violence functions narratively and ideologically in these storylines. I will begin by outlining the findings of my timeline research, considering where these episodes are positioned within broader series' structures, before moving on to explore representational and narrative patterns across these storylines. The chapter then examines how sexual violence functions narratively and ideologically across these narratives. From this research, four main narrative functions of sexual violence can be discerned (see Appendix C). Sexual violence is framed as a social issue, operates as a warning about the vulnerability of (female) youth, as a catalyst for romance and/or as a mystery to be solved. These categories are not mutually exclusive and overlaps are

⁴³ Lesley Henderson's (2007) study of the representation of social issues in television soap operas is an exception here, but she focuses on serial rather than episodic storylines.

common. I will explore each of these functions in turn, considering their dominant narrative structure and how sexual violence is depicted and framed, using specific episodes from *Beverly Hills*, *My So-Called Life*, *One Tree Hill* and *Smallville* to illustrate these patterns in more depth. By choosing episodes that are spread over more than a decade, from 1991 to 2005, it allows me also to discern developments across the genre over time. I then explore the broader ideological patterns underlying these episodes before offering some conclusions.

Structural, Narrative and Representational Patterns

Striking patterns emerge from the timeline research, which indicate the value of contextualising representations of sexual violence in individual programmes within broader series' and generic structures. There are forty-one of these episodic sexual violence narratives in total, spread across eight out of the eleven US programmes that I examined. *Freaks and Geeks*, *Dawson's Creek* and *Friday Night Lights* did not contain any. (I discuss possible reasons for this in Chapter 3.) As Chapter 3 also indicates, these episodes tend to occur in earlier seasons of series and are featured most prominently in *Buffy* and *Smallville*, suggesting a particular affinity between supernatural series and representations of sexual violence, as I shall go on to discuss later in this chapter.

Using the broad patterns uncovered through the timeline research as a starting point, my subsequent textual analysis reveals further patterns across these episodes in relation to the types of sexual violence depicted, how they are represented and how they function narratively (Table 5.1).

Type of Sexual Violence	Victim Protagonist	Victim Central	Victim Marginal	Perpetrator Protagonist	Perpetrator Central	Perpetrator Marginal
Attempted Rape	F1	F3 / M2	F1			M5 / F2
Dating Violence		F3	F4			M6 / F1
Sexual Assault	F2	F5			M3	M2 / F1
Sexually-Motivated Murder		F2 / M1	F1 / M2			M3 / F3
Rape			F4			M4
Sexual Harassment		F4		M1		M3
Homophobic Abuse		M1	F1 / M2			M2 / F1
Stalking		F2				M2
Sexualised Blackmail			F1			M1
Forced Prostitution			F1			F1

Table 5.1 Type of sexual violence and role of victim/perpetrator in US episodic narratives.

The above table shows the different types of sexual violence depicted in episodic narratives and how many storylines there are for each type, beginning with the most common and ending with the least common. It also maps the gender of the victim and perpetrator (F/M) and their respective character status (protagonist/central/marginal).

As we can see, episodic sexual violence narratives focus predominantly on physical acts of male sexual violence against women; most commonly, attempted rape, dating violence, sexual assault or, exclusively in the case of supernatural series, sexually-motivated murder. Less commonly, the narratives focus on rape, sexual harassment, homophobic abuse, stalking, sexualised blackmail and forced prostitution. Perpetrators are typically marginal male characters and victims are either central or marginal, usually female, characters. They are rarely series' protagonists. Of the forty-one narratives, thirty-two feature males as perpetrators and nine feature females as perpetrators. (Episodes in which females commit sexual violence, with few exceptions, occur in supernatural series). Notably, episodic rape storylines always feature non-recurring characters in the roles of both victim and perpetrator. The prominence of attempted rather than fully realised rape indicates the inherent difficulties of sexual representation in a genre which often features

embodied teenage actors and is watched by a young audience. Fully realised rape always occurs off-screen.⁴⁴

There are significant differences in the types of sexual violence portrayed in the supernatural series *Buffy* and *Smallville*, as well as their victims and perpetrators. With few exceptions, these are the only programmes that feature (always marginal) female perpetrators of sexual violence and (central or marginal) male victims.⁴⁵ They are also the only programmes to feature episodic narratives involving sexually-motivated murder. *Buffy* is the only programme to feature the series' protagonist as the victim in three episodic sexual violence narratives, one involving attempted rape and the other two involving sexual assault.⁴⁶ *Smallville* is the only series to feature the male protagonist as perpetrator of sexual violence (See episode 613 'Crimson').

Episodic narratives in *Buffy* and *Smallville* pose particular problems when defining sexual violence. In these supernatural series, sexual violence is often disguised in various ways. For example, a recurring storyline in *Smallville* involves monsters or sub-humans who kill their victims with the 'kiss of death', literally sucking the life out of them.⁴⁷ I have defined the type of sexual violence depicted in these storylines as 'sexually-motivated murder'. Highlighting the sexual nature of this crime, perpetrators target members of the opposite sex and the abuse predominantly occurs within dating relationships.

Buffy also features narratives that operate as allegories for sexual violence, without explicitly featuring this abuse on screen. For example, in episode 205 'Reptile Boy', Buffy lies to her mother and goes to a fraternity party with Cordelia to meet up with some older men. There, she has an alcoholic drink that turns out to be spiked and passes out in an empty bedroom. Cordelia's drink is also spiked and she too is taken to the bedroom by one of the men. Neither Buffy nor Cordelia is sexually assaulted – instead they are tied up to be sacrificed to a giant monster. However, the episode features heavy analogies to date rape and, thus, I have included it in my analysis of sexual violence episodes, categorising the abuse as attempted rape. Notably, I have omitted vampire attacks in *Buffy* in my analysis of episodic sexual violence narratives. This is partially because these are so pervasive that to count each one would detract from broader structural patterns across the series.

⁴⁴ See *Veronica Mars* episodes 107 'The Girl Next Door' and 216 'The Rapes of Graff'.

⁴⁵ See *Veronica Mars* episodes 214 'Versatile Toppings' and 311 'Poughkeepsie, Tramps and Thieves' in which the perpetrator of sexual violence is a non-recurring female. See also *My So-Called Life* episode 115 'So-Called Angels' in which central homosexual male teen, Rickie, is the victim of homophobic abuse.

⁴⁶ See episodes 106 'The Pack', 205 'Reptile Boy' and 220 'Go Fish'.

⁴⁷ Examples include episodes 105 'Cool', 206 'Redux', 403 'Façade'. *Buffy* also features a 'kiss of death' episode (204 'Inca Mummy Girl').

Additionally, while these attacks are sexualised – vampires are figures that traditionally connote sexual threat – they are rarely explicitly sexual. Vampires frequently physically attack Buffy and her friends but this violence is rarely sexual. (I discuss the few exceptions to this rule in Chapter 7).

A further issue arises when defining sexual violence in *Buffy* and *Smallville*. Both programmes feature several narratives in which characters commit sexually violent acts while they are possessed by a demon spirit or magic substance. With one exception, these storylines account for all narratives in the table in which central teenage characters are perpetrators of sexual violence.⁴⁸ These episodes raise important questions about the perpetrator's culpability. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, *Buffy* features an episode (106 'The Pack') in which Xander is possessed by the spirit of a hyena and goes on to sexually assault Buffy. His possession renders his culpability questionable. However, despite this ambiguity, I have included storylines in which characters commit sexually violent acts while possessed in my analysis of episodic sexual violence narratives as the programmes, themselves, often leave it open as to exactly how under-the-spell the character was (I will discuss this in more detail in relation to an episode of *Smallville* (417 'Onyx') later in this chapter). Notably, I have not included all possession narratives here. Both *Smallville* and *Buffy* feature storylines in which teenage (usually male, non-recurring) characters use magic powers to manipulate members of the opposite sex into dating them.⁴⁹ Although these narratives involve a lack of informed consent, thereby rendering the relationship abusive, at the same time, they feature no explicit representations of sexual violence on screen and the victim experiences no fear. As such, I have not included them in my analysis of episodic sexual violence narratives.

Regardless of the programme's generic hybridity, actual moments of sexual violence last only a few seconds before the victim's (usually female) friends intervene. For example, the prominence of *attempted* rape means that very little is depicted before it is interrupted. The sexual nature of these attacks is largely implied through a forcible kiss and their positioning following a flirtatious exchange between members of the opposite sex, while the violent aspect of these moments is portrayed by a quick physical struggle and the victim's audible protests. Dramatic tension is heightened by ominous non-diegetic music, rapid editing, tight close ups and shadowy lighting, which make it difficult to discern what exactly is happening on-screen. As Chapter 4 outlined, these sexual attacks take place in unfamiliar, isolated settings at night – either at parties at peers' houses or at the local

⁴⁸ The exception is the pilot episode of *Gossip Girl*, which I talk about in more detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁹ For examples, see *Smallville* episode 404 'Devoted' or *Buffy* episode 706 'Him'.

college (*Beverly Hills*, *Buffy*, *Veronica Mars*, *One Tree Hill*, *The O.C.*) or in outdoor spaces (a car park in *My So-Called Life*), thereby heightening the narrative drama by departing from the series' familiar locations.

By adopting this particular aesthetic style when representing moments of physical sexual violence - a style that remains fairly consistent across the eighteen year period of my analysis - this abuse occupies a fleeting space on-screen. Yet, these actual moments are not the only aspect of this violence that teen drama series evade. As I shall go on to argue, sexual violence is rarely dealt with as a form of gendered abuse in these programmes and is, instead, used to highlight other issues.

Narrative Functions

Problem-of-the-week: sexual violence as a social issue

Social issue or 'very special' episodes are largely specific to the early 1990s and in particular, to *Beverly Hills*, which many scholars cite as one of the earliest examples of a teen drama series (Moseley 2001; Dickinson 2004).⁵⁰ These episodes tackle a topic of social significance, such as alcoholism or sexual violence, through the experience of a central teenage character in order to bring it to the attention of a wider teenage audience. Notably, they are the only episodes to frame sexual violence *as* sexual violence, rather than using the abuse to highlight another theme, such as a romance between characters. These storylines prioritise the different ideological perspectives on sexual violence of the ensemble cast, exploring various rape myths through didactic dialogue. Unlike the other narratives discussed in this chapter, social issue storylines also emphasise the aftermath of the experience on the victim, in which they usually learn an important moral lesson, ending on a positive note.

A *Beverly Hills* episode (213 'Halloween') in which central female character, Kelly is almost raped by a non-recurring male character provides a useful example here. The episode aired on Halloween in 1991, thus, from the outset it is linked to a once-a-year holiday, marking it as special and unusual. The episode's opening and title further connote danger by recalling the horror film series. It begins atypically, creating a spooky atmosphere by opening with a lengthy sequence of close ups of carved, candlelit

⁵⁰ The term 'very special' emerged in the early 1990s as a marketing device to warn viewers of episodes that dealt with potentially controversial subject matter. It is widely attributed to the US teen sitcom *Blossom* (NBC, 1991-1995).

Halloween pumpkins accompanied by wailing electric guitar, faint human screams and animalistic howls.

Before the attempted rape takes place, the narrative emphasises Kelly's appearance and actions. Several of her friends express concern over her revealing choice of Halloween costume and she is framed as a sexual object through the camerawork. As she enters the party, the camera slowly pans up her body before cutting to crowds of leering teenage boys. Three-quarters of the way through the episode, Kelly and an older male that she has been flirting with go upstairs to an empty bedroom to talk (Figure 5.1). Once there the tone shifts abruptly from romance to explicit danger.



Figure 5.1 Kelly's Halloween costume in *Beverly Hills 90210* (213 'Halloween')

Atypically for a scene of sexual violence, in any type of narrative form, the room is brightly lit yet it is a cool light which, far from promoting a warm atmosphere, creates an unsettling environment which is heightened by the unfamiliar setting. As the man caresses Kelly's cheek, sinister non-diegetic strings rise in pitch and volume, indicating imminent threat. A sudden non-diegetic drum beat adds to this threatening atmosphere as he roughly pushes her onto the bed. Throughout the scene, he remains visually dominant, obscuring Kelly almost completely as he lies on top of her and overshadowing her in facial close ups as he tries to kiss her. These forcible kisses underscore the sexual nature of the attack, which is further indicated by his frequent verbal assumptions about Kelly's sexual history. Her cries of 'get off!' are audible throughout as she struggles against him and fleeting glimpses of her facial expression highlight her pain and fear. This attempted rape occupies just twenty-five seconds screen-time, before Kelly's female friends interrupt and she escapes. The friends then call for help from their male friends, Dylan and Steve, who forcibly remove the perpetrator from the party.

What distinguishes social issue episodes from other episodic sexual violence narratives is what happens next. As I go on to discuss in the following sections, episodic sexual violence narratives rarely dwell on the aftermath of the attack on the victim. In contrast, in 'Halloween' Kelly's attempted rape is followed by a lengthy discussion between her and her female friends that directly explores rape myths, such as victim-blaming. However, echoing the findings of Moorti (2002), Cuklanz (2000) and Projansky (2001), albeit in a different context, this conversation does not promote a shared identity between these women based on the prevalence of gendered oppression. Each female is framed in close up alone and the content of their speech is not mutually reinforcing. For example, when Kelly blames her revealing dress for prompting the attempted rape, her female friends concur that her outfit was 'a little too much'. Instead, as the following extract demonstrates, it is Dylan that interrupts and challenges these myths, arguing that:

I want you to know that, as a guy, it doesn't matter how much of a magnet a girl turns on, a guy always has the choice of not making her do something she doesn't want to do.

Dylan's authority is highlighted by his framing and the editing: he stands as he delivers his speech, which is interspersed with shots of the seated female characters listening supportively. The tendency of central male characters to espouse the most feminist sentiments on sexual violence, in contrast to the antifeminist opinions expressed by female characters, again reflects the findings of scholarship on televisual depictions of sexual violence more broadly (Cuklanz, 2000; Projansky, 2001; Moorti, 2002).

Ultimately, although this episode prioritises multiple perspectives on sexual violence, as Moorti explains, 'the closure that is enforced on the text draws our attention toward a particularized understanding of rape, while marginalizing other interpretations' (2002: 116). As issue-of-the-week episodes in *Beverly Hills* typically end with the character that has experienced the problem learning a lesson, there is a strong implication that Kelly has learnt to act and dress differently to avoid unwanted male attention. In the final scene she wears a cloak that covers her entire body. The narrative emphasis on Kelly, here, problematically places the onus for change on the victim rather than the perpetrator, who disappears after Steve punches him. Sexual violence as a social issue, then, is something of a misnomer. Instead, it is framed through a personal lens, namely Kelly's, and acts as a didactic warning to (female) viewers about the perils of attempting to act or dress older than their age, rather than a warning about the potential dangers of normative constructions of gendered sexuality that promote male sexual dominance and female sexual submission.

This emphasis on warning young viewers about the dangers of certain behaviours or activities through the experience of a teenage character is by no means unique to sexual violence storylines in *Beverly Hills*. As producer Aaron Spelling explains, ‘We didn’t want to do silly things. We wanted to deal with real issues’ (cited in McKinley, 1997: 24). Storylines in early episodes feature a central teenage character dealing with a different problem each week, such as shoplifting (103 ‘Every Dream Has Its Price’), racism (105 ‘One on One’) and a breast cancer scare (118 ‘It’s Only a Test’). B.Y.O.B. (111), an episode in which protagonist, Brandon deals with an addiction to alcohol, warns viewers of the dangers of underage drinking in a particularly heavy-handed manner. In the space of three days (and forty minutes screen-time), Brandon goes from abhorring alcohol to drink driving, crashing his car, having his license revoked and spending a night in jail. At the end of the episode, he is escorted to an Alcoholics’ Anonymous meeting.

From the mid 1990s onwards there is a shift away from framing issues in this didactic, moralising manner. Illustrating this shift, Joss Whedon, *Buffy*’s creator, explicitly stated that there will never be a ‘very special’ *Buffy* (Wilcox 1999: 34). Later programmes self-consciously mock these types of episodes. For example, in response to institutional homophobia in *Dawson’s Creek* (a narrative I discuss in the following chapter), one of the central male teenagers wryly remarks, ‘this week, on a very special episode of Capeside High...’ (214 ‘To Be Or Not To Be...’). As I illustrate in Chapter 2, teen television scholarship is similarly derisive of issue-led episodes, arguing that they often portray issues unrealistically by not allowing for sufficient space to deal with them in any kind of narrative complexity (Wilcox 1999: 34). Yet, for all the obvious problems with these episodes, it is significant to note that the social issues do not have to be disguised to achieve narrative significance. ‘B.Y.O.B.’ is *about* alcoholism, just as ‘Halloween’ is *about* sexual violence. Dylan’s speech and the discussion between Kelly and her friends following her attack, for instance, directly engages with feminist discourses on this abuse and the aftermath of the attack on the victim is explored. As the following sections illustrate, other narrative forms dominate from the mid 1990s onwards.

Lock Up Your Daughters: Sexual violence and the vulnerability of (female) youth

The second narrative function of sexual violence in these episodic storylines overlaps with social issue narratives, albeit in a less heavy-handed manner, in its emphasis on warning young viewers about the dangers of certain activities or behaviours. The central difference between these two types of narratives is what happens *after* the sexual violence

has taken place. While social issue episodes focus on the aftermath of the attack on the victim, the narratives discussed in this section swiftly move away from the victim to address other themes. As noted in the previous chapter, the instability of the liminal stage between childhood and adulthood is a central theme across the genre and a number of episodes from 1990 to the present day emphasise the vulnerability of youth. This theme is manifested variously in storylines from early seasons of series about teenage characters getting drunk (*Beverly Hills*), succumbing to peer pressure (*Gossip Girl*) or holding parties when their parents are out of town (*Freaks and Geeks*). In all cases, the teenager learns an important lesson about trying to grow up too fast when events spiral out of their control.

Yet, as demonstrated by Kelly in *Beverly Hills*, this vulnerability is heightened in relation to young *female* characters. While there are storylines featuring the negative consequences for male teenagers in attempting to act older than they are, these consequences are not sexually threatening. For example, an equivalent storyline in *Dawson's Creek* involves Dawson ruining his sixteenth birthday by going to a club and getting drunk, with no sexually threatening ramifications (216 'Be Careful What You Wish For'). In contrast, when female characters get drunk, this is often followed by them being sexually assaulted. In these storylines, female teenagers are sexually attacked by older males at night in settings that are marked as 'adult' spaces, such as night clubs or college parties, after attempting to act and/or dress older than their age. The victim – Kelly in *Beverly Hills*, Rayanne in *My So-Called Life*, Peyton in *One Tree Hill* – comes from a dysfunctional family background with little parental support and, in turn, enjoys excessive independence for her young age. Thus, these episodes not only act as a warning about sexual violence, but about other social problems such as parental neglect. In these episodes, sexual violence acts as a reminder of the female characters' age-related vulnerability. Significantly, this vulnerability is heightened in relation to *single* females, reinforcing the argument put forward in Chapter 4 that, in these programmes, sexuality outside the context of a monogamous, romantic relationship is a dangerous space for young women. The victim is always single at the time of the attack, which occurs after she has been flirting with the perpetrator.

The 1994 pilot of *My So-Called Life* provides an interesting example here. This opening episode establishes the series' premise which is concerned with the changing nature of the heroine, Angela's, relationships with her parents, friends and classmates as she matures. In this episode, Angela lies to her parents and goes to an over-21s night club with her new friends Rayanne and Rickie, changing on the way into a tight, revealing outfit. After being denied entry to the club, the friends sit in the car park, drinking alcohol. It is here that Rayanne is sexually assaulted by an older, male stranger who pushes her

roughly against a car and kisses her without her consent. Like the attempted rape scene discussed in the previous section, the actual moment in which Rayanne is sexually assaulted occupies only ten seconds of screen-time. A rapid series of tight close ups capture her struggle as she tries to fight off the man, her teeth gritted and eyes tightly shut, before Angela intervenes and the man throws Rayanne to the ground. The scene is all the more poignant and shocking because this is the first time that Rayanne appears vulnerable. Up until this point, she has been self-assured and cocky. The perpetrator disappears when some police officers arrive although, notably, he is not arrested.

Illustrating an overlap with sexual violence-as-a-catalyst-for-romance storylines, discussed in the following section, the narrative then diverts away from the sexual assault to highlight the theme of budding romance. As Rayanne and Angela get into the police car to be driven home, Jordan, the boy that Angela has a crush on, notices her and calls her name. This is the first time in the programme that he has properly acknowledged her and is marked by upbeat non-diegetic music and Angela's broad smile, as she stares back at him. This moment between Angela and Jordan diverts attention away from the sexual assault and from Rayanne. Illustrating the shift away from social issue episodes in the mid 1990s, there is little emphasis in these types of episodes on the emotional aftermath of the assault on the victim. Indeed, Rayanne suffers from alcohol-induced amnesia, a common trait of episodic sexual violence narratives that allows programmes to ignore this issue altogether. The sexual assault does, however, have a profound effect on *Angela*, highlighting to her the dangers of acting older than her age. Further, it acts as a warning about the consequences of parental neglect. When Rayanne returns home following the attack, Angela's voice-over stresses that nobody is there.

When Angela returns home, she finds her father talking intimately with an anonymous woman outside the family home (it is suggested they are having an affair). The camera cuts to a medium close up of Angela in side profile as she stares, circling in front of her to reveal her shocked expression which is underscored by the emotive non-diegetic soundtrack of R.E.M.'s 'Everybody Hurts', a popular song at the time the episode aired. The shock of realising that her father is flawed functions narratively in a similar way to Rayanne's sexual attack, indicating to Angela that she is not fully ready or prepared for the realities of (sexual) adulthood. As Angela returns to her warmly lit house, she begins to regress. She stares at her reflection in her bedroom mirror before harshly wiping off her lipstick, indicating a rejection of the adult life she previously craved. The camera follows her down the hall to her parents' bedroom where she climbs into bed with her mother and cries. The two women are framed together as her mother gently strokes Angela's hair and

comforts her. A final close up of Angela's face, accompanied by her voice-over, indicates that she has fallen asleep in her mother's arms.

Like the previous example discussed, sexual violence is framed here as a young woman's personal experience, rather than a wider social or political issue. Yet, notably, the episode privileges Angela's, not Rayanne's, reaction. This is common throughout the series. For example, storylines involving Rayanne's dysfunctional family life and problems with alcohol recur in the programme, highlighting the prominent generic theme of youthful vulnerability, but this theme is never again highlighted with sexual violence. As Angela is the series' heroine, these are typically reconfigured as personal storylines about her, not Rayanne. In a later episode when Rayanne consumes too much alcohol (110 'Other People's Mothers'), the narrative is reframed as a personal story about Angela's relationship with her mother, who helps take Rayanne to hospital. The emphasis on the personal rather than the social in this series is reflected by the sexual violence narrative. At the end of the pilot, an individualised understanding of sexual violence is privileged. In the final scene, Rickie and Rayanne boast to their school peers, uncorrected by Angela, about the events of their weekend. Rayanne appears completely unphased, again illustrating the later shift away from the emphasis on the victim's emotional aftermath. The violent nature of Rayanne's assault is erased here, with Rickie using the language of a normative, non-abusive dating ritual to describe their encounter with the men. This assimilation of sexual violence into dating discourse resonates more widely with teenage culture and experiences of intimate relationships, in which, studies have revealed, sexual abuse is common (Chung, 2007). Yet, like social issue episodes, by framing sexual violence in this way and equating it with other issues such as parental neglect, it becomes divorced from the broader gendered sexual inequalities underpinning this abuse.

Episodic sexual violence as a catalyst for romance

The third narrative function of episodic sexual violence narratives identified in my research is as a catalyst for teenage heterosexual romance. These episodes operate similarly and, as indicated by the *My So-Called Life* example, often overlap with the previous episodes discussed. In these narratives, a central female teenager (but never the series' protagonist) is physically sexually attacked, which in turn prompts the beginning of a heterosexual romantic relationship between her friends who grow closer while looking after her. Although the sexual violence narrative remains self-contained, this romance storyline stretches further, with the couple kissing or going on a date in the subsequent episode. Immediately following the sexual attack, the romance narrative takes precedence

and the perpetrator and victim become largely obscured. Thus, in these episodes, sexual violence functions primarily to highlight, rather than problematise, hegemonic ideals of heterosexual romance.

It is important to stress here that it is not only sexual violence narratives that operate as catalysts for romance, but also other highly dramatic storylines that involve explicit physical threat. In both *Veronica Mars* and *One Tree Hill* a high school shooting (or suspected shooting) prompts passionate kisses for each programme's protagonist.⁵¹ By connecting romance with danger, the genre privileges an idea of romance that prioritises passion, spontaneity, adrenaline and fear rather than stability and comfort.

An earlier episode of *One Tree Hill* from 2003 (108 'The Search for Something More'), in which central female character, Peyton, is drugged and almost raped provides a useful example here. From the outset of the episode, romance is established as a central theme. The pre-credit sequence reminds viewers of previous storylines that this episode will develop further, several of which focus on the beginnings of romantic relationships between core characters.

Illustrating an overlap with the previous episodes discussed, like Kelly and Rayanne, Peyton is single when she is attacked by Gabe - an older, non-recurring male character - while at a college party. Aesthetically, the moment of sexual violence is similar to the other examples discussed in this chapter: the camera alternates quickly between tight facial close-ups that highlight Peyton's fear and long-shots that emphasise Gabe's physical dominance as he looms over her, and the scene is accompanied by a sinister soundtrack and shadowy lighting. However, unusually, the scene is intercut with narratives involving other characters, thereby heightening suspense by delaying its resolution. Eventually, Brooke, Peyton's female friend, intervenes, stopping the attack, before calling series' protagonist, Lucas, for help. This is a common trait across many self-contained sexual violence episodes: the victim's female friend calls a central male character, who then physically threatens the perpetrator. Sexual violence, then, becomes the site for the display for ideal masculinity as these males protect and defend the victim from the perpetrator. 'Halloween' operates similarly, with Kelly's friends calling for Dylan and Steve.

In *One Tree Hill*, Brooke and Lucas grow closer while watching over Peyton as she sleeps off the effects of the date-rape drug. Like Rayanne, Peyton suffers from amnesia following the ordeal, thus allowing the programme to side-step the aftermath of the attack on her and concentrate on Brooke and Lucas's budding romantic relationship. Indicating

⁵¹ See *Veronica Mars* episode 118 'Weapons of Class Destruction' and *One Tree Hill* episode 316 'With Tired Eyes, Tired Minds, Tired Souls, We Slept'.

the narrative prioritisation of this romance storyline, while sleeping, Peyton is positioned at the back of the frame (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2 Peyton is pushed to the back of the frame in *One Tree Hill* (108 'The Search for Something More')

In contrast, Brooke and Lucas are framed in the foreground, sharing an intimate conversation. Moreover, the attempted rape occurs in the first third of the episode while the romance narrative dominates the rest and is intercut with other romantic storylines involving central characters. The episode ends with a shot of Lucas staring wistfully after Peyton and Brooke, establishing the first five seasons' meta narrative which focuses on a love triangle between the three.

Sexual violence here functions to restore and uphold rather than complicate hegemonic ideals of gendered sexuality. Peyton is rendered largely invisible, both visually and narratively, while Gabe disappears after the attack, allowing the programme to ignore questions regarding the relationship between masculinity and violence and instead concentrate on Brooke and Lucas. Rather than critiquing hegemonic gendered constructions, sexual violence becomes a site for the display of ideal masculinity through Lucas, who is presented as upholding the moral (patriarchal) order by heroically defending Peyton. Aggression in the service of protecting the female victim is tolerated, and even glamourised, as an expression of normative masculinity, separating this behaviour from the violence committed by the one-dimensional perpetrator. Further, while it is typically the female friends of the victim that initially interrupt and stop the sexual attack, in these types of episodes the narrative quickly shifts to focus on male responses. It is Lucas, not Brooke, who comforts Peyton when she wakes up. Thus, once again, sexual violence as a form of gendered abuse is not dealt with and, instead, the attempted rape is used as a kind of

narrative stepping stone to highlight Lucas' and Brooke's growing attraction to one another.

As Appendix C indicates, a sexual-violence-as-a-catalyst-for-romance narrative also occurs in the pilot episode of *Gossip Girl*, when central male, Dan, secures the affections of his love interest, Serena, after rescuing his younger sister, Jenny, from being sexually assaulted. What is striking about this narrative is that unlike other episodic sexual violence storylines in which perpetrators are typically non-recurring males, in this narrative the perpetrator is central teenage male, Chuck. This makes it more difficult to see sexual violence as an isolated problem in an otherwise functioning patriarchy. However, despite this central difference, sexual violence functions similarly to the *One Tree Hill* example, creating a space for Dan to display his ideal or 'good' masculinity, through his chivalrous protection of Jenny, in stark contrast to Chuck's 'bad' masculinity. Importantly, Chuck is a villain in the first season and, thus, like the other examples discussed in this chapter, sexual violence becomes the domain of an individual 'bad' man.⁵² Further, like Peyton, Jenny is marginalised following the attack, rendering this a storyline about male rivalry as well as Dan and Serena's budding romantic relationship.

Crime and punishment: sexual violence as mystery-of-the-week

My study of the timelines reveals that the most common type of sexual violence episode in teen drama series frames this violence as a mystery to be solved and/or a monster to be defeated (see Appendix C). There are thirty-one of these episodes in total, accounting for three-quarters of all episodic sexual violence narratives in US series. These types of narratives are found predominantly in long-running supernatural series that feature teenage protagonists with superpowers such as *Buffy* and *Smallville* as well as in *Veronica Mars*, a teen/noir hybrid drama series which follows a teenage female private investigator. *Beverly Hills* also contains a single sexual violence as mystery episode (109 'The Gentle Art of Listening'). In these episodes, the brief pre-credit sequence outlines the main narrative threat and subsequent mystery to be solved. The mystery element involves the teenage protagonist and their friends identifying who (or what) the perpetrator is and how to punish or, in the case of supernatural series in which the perpetrators are typically monsters, destroy them. Sexual violence becomes a site in which the core teenagers' intelligence and resourcefulness are highlighted as they solve these individual mysteries. What is notable about these episodes, in contrast to the other examples discussed in this

⁵² Notably, Chuck later becomes more sympathetic when he falls in love with central female, Blair, and viewers learn of his troubled home life. This illustrates the fluidity of character roles in teen drama series discussed in Chapter 4.

chapter, is that these investigations focus firmly on the perpetrator. As such, the narrative does not dwell on the victim's actions prior to the moment of sexual violence. As the protagonist and their friends are unaffiliated with any legal or judicial institutions, (which are typically depicted in the programmes as ineffectual and inadequate in upholding the law), the justice exacted is intensely personal. Like other episodic sexual violence storylines, these types of narratives occur more regularly in earlier seasons of the programmes. As aforementioned I will look at *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* in Chapter 7 and, thus, here I will concentrate on *Smallville*.

Danger is established from the outset of sexual violence episodes in *Smallville*, through the *mise-en-scene*, camerawork and soundtrack. Episodes typically open at night in an unfamiliar outdoor setting. The viewer is aligned with the camera, forced to follow it as it sweeps, swerves and weaves through the unknown space, creating a sense of disorientation. Ominous non-diegetic music intensifies this threatening atmosphere, rising in volume as the final shot reveals a close up of the narrative threat, manifested in the figure of a monster or sub-human staring menacingly at the camera. Threats in *Smallville* episodes are typically humans who have gained superpowers from their exposure to remnants of meteor rock, or more precisely kryptonite, that are spread throughout the town.

As the narrative unfolds, these monsters tend to retain their human visage and exhibit similar behaviour to their 'normal' self prior to their exposure to kryptonite. 'Metamorphosis', the second episode of *Smallville* and the first that depicts sexual violence, exemplifies these parallels between the 'monster' and the man. In this episode, Greg Arkin, a geeky teenage peer of Clark's, gains superpowers after being bitten by a swarm of kryptonite-infected insects. Although he retains his human form, he acquires insect powers such as heightened agility and strength. He also adopts an insect life cycle, telling his mother that first he will eat, then molt, then mate. He proceeds to kill his mother, shed a layer of skin and capture and cocoon his (and Clark's) love interest, Lana, with the intention of 'mating' with (i.e. raping) her. As is common in supernatural series, the sexual nature of the violence is implicit in the use of this biological term. Yet, even before he is bitten by the insects, he exhibits sexually threatening behaviour making it difficult to clearly distinguish the monster/potential rapist from the man. When Greg is first introduced in the pre-credit sequence (prior to his transformation), he is depicted in medium long shot crouched in a tree outside Lana's window at night, filming her voyeuristically (Figure 5.3).

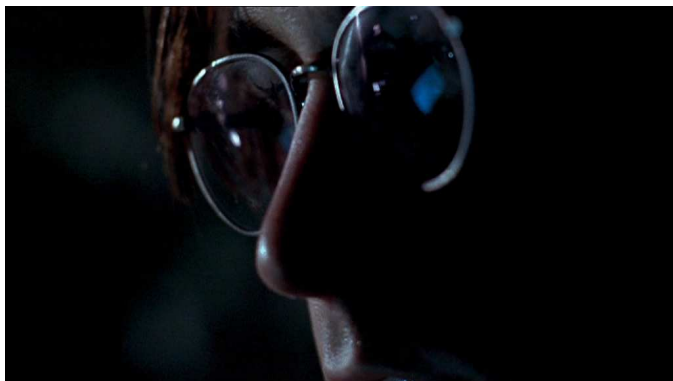


Figure 5.3 Greg's voyeurism of Lana in *Smallville*, prior to his transformation (102 'Metamorphosis')

He is visually and aurally coded as monstrous *before* he is bitten, shrouded in shadow, his presence accompanied by ominous non-diegetic music. Indeed, his acquisition of superpowers simply allows him to act out his secret desires, fighting off Lana's physically strong boyfriend and taking her for himself. Furthermore, he is not massively visually transformed, losing only the geeky characteristics that render him powerless in the diegetic context of the genre, such as his acne and glasses.

The central aspect of Greg that changes, aside from his acquisition of superpowers, is his ability to express emotion. Monsters in *Smallville* are often emotionally inexpressive, indicating a loss of humanity which discourages viewer identification. They rarely express remorse for their aggressive behaviour.⁵³ Even when Greg verbally expresses jealousy about Lana and Clark's friendship, his voice and appearance remain level and calm. Notably, Clark is the only other character in the series that is also emotionally inexpressive, creating a parallel between him and Greg (and other monsters in the series). He rarely shows overt anger, sadness or even happiness, instead suffering in silence. Further parallels are made between Clark and Greg through the editing. In the pre-credit sequence, Clark too is depicted staring longingly at Lana's house and at several times throughout the episode, the viewer is tricked into thinking a point of view is Greg's when it is, in fact, Clark's.

Yet, a key difference between Clark and Greg (and villains more widely in the series) relates to their control and use of their superpowers. Clark uses his powers for innately good and selfless reasons, to help and protect others, while the 'monsters' tend to have an insatiable, selfish desire for power. It is this quest for power that often results in the villains' death. In 'Metamorphosis', Greg, consumed with trying to kill Clark,

⁵³ A parallel can be made between their blankness and the inexpressiveness of the sociopathic serial killer, exemplified by Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991).

unwittingly pulls a chain which releases a piece of machinery that ultimately crushes him. Notably, Clark tries to warn him before this happens, reiterating his selflessness. Clark never takes pleasure in hurting others and even though episodes often end with a climatic showdown between him and the perpetrator, his use of aggression tends to be defensive rather than pro-active.

When discussing Clark alongside Max Evans (Jason Behr), the protagonist of *Roswell*, another supernatural teen drama series, Feasey observes that:

Although these men have extraordinary powers that could position them as the very zenith of strong, aggressive and forceful masculinity, these young men make it clear that they are seeking to defend rather than dominate their surrounds, and as such, these teenagers have very little interest in encouraging or upholding rigid images of the hegemonic male (2008: 51).

Banks, too, celebrates Clark and Max as a new type of hero in the male-fronted teen drama series, commenting on these men's ability to 'emote without losing control' (2004: 22). Yet, interestingly, both Feasey and Banks largely ignore the fact that the masculinity that Max and Clark display is, arguably, *super*-masculinity, removed from normative masculinity by their alien status. Positioning a character with super-masculinity at the centre of these series potentially renders normative masculinity strange and unnatural.

Clark's sexuality is inextricably linked to his superpowers. As Banks explains, 'Max and Clark's transformations are like alien puberty: they often feel uncomfortable at first with their growing abilities' (2004: 24). In season two, Clark accidentally triggers his heat vision when thinking about sex, making this connection between teenage male hormones and superpowers explicit (202 'Heat'). Yet, as he matures, Clark gains mastery over his powers. This control, in contrast to the erratic aggression of 'monsters' in the series, foregrounds the notion of choice. The connection between teenage alien superpowers and puberty means that this choice and control can be related to sexuality.

Further disrupting divisions between 'normal' men and individual 'bad' perpetrators of sexual violence, as aforementioned, in *Buffy* and *Smallville* central male (and, occasionally, female) characters can commit sexually violent acts. Notably, at least in episodic narratives, they only do so when possessed by a supernatural force or substance and usually suffer from amnesia afterwards, thereby removing, at least partially, their culpability and ensuring that they remain sympathetic in future episodes. However, Boyle observes, albeit in relation to *Buffy*, that 'as major characters move from one position to another any ideas of "absolute" evil become increasingly complicated' (2005b: 41). The positioning of these core (human) male characters in sexually violent roles potentially foregrounds the relationship between heterosexual masculinity and violence.

Smallville episode 'Onyx' (417) provides a useful example here. In this episode, Lex Luthor, a human male with no superpowers, sexually harasses Lana after he is exposed to black kryptonite and split into two binary good/evil entities. Predictably, it is 'evil' Lex who attacks Lana. As is characteristic of *Smallville* episodes more widely, the pre-credit sequence outlines how Lex becomes divided in two, ending with an ominous facial close up, accompanied by non-diegetic pulsing drums. Halfway through the episode, the 'bad' Lex imprisons the 'good' Lex and assumes narrative agency. Thus, when he visits Lana in her home, the viewer is aware that he is a threat from the outset.

Lex expresses his romantic intentions towards Lana, caressing her face as he does so. Visibly tense, she recoils, protectively moving her own hand to her face. They are framed facing each other as Lex grips her arms and leans in to kiss her. Her stiffness indicates her unwillingness as she pushes him off and slaps him. The camera cuts between close ups of the two, registering Lex's nonchalance and Lana's fear as she inhales deeply and moves away. Upset and angry, Lana asks Lex to leave and the camera follows him to the door. But as he goes, he informs Lana that he is going to evict her, offering her the ultimatum that she either, 'live like a queen by [his] side or get tossed out with the rest of the garbage'. Before he leaves, he smirks while sleazily looking her up and down. The camera lingers on a close up of Lana, tearful, wide-eyed and open mouthed, illustrating how afraid and upset she is. It is notable that while the sexual nature of the attack is apparent in the forcible kiss, this type of violence is less overtly sexual and physical than the other examples discussed in this chapter. Arguably, in the context of *Smallville*, which is a particularly sexually chaste series, a forcible kiss represents much more than it may do in other programmes.⁵⁴

For the rest of the episode, the core characters debate who the real Lex is. While Clark maintains that the 'evil' Lex is not the real Lex, his friend, Chloe, comments frequently about Lex's less than scrupulous behaviour prior to his division, creating parallels between the two. On two separate occasions Chloe refers to Lex's 'split personality' and his 'evil twin', while Clark describes him as 'not entirely human'. Further complicating the separation of the 'real' Lex from the 'evil' Lex, his sexist and misogynistic treatment of Lana, while atypical for Lex and Lana's relationship, is not atypical to his treatment of non-recurring female characters in the series. This behaviour is explicitly highlighted in an earlier episode (409 'Bound') in which one of Lex's ex-lovers

⁵⁴ Clark and Lana do not lose their virginities until the beginning of season five (502 'Mortal'), which is extremely late in the context of the genre more widely. Furthermore, the other core characters are rarely depicted having sex either. Lex's promiscuity is frequently alluded to, but his sexual exploits are rarely depicted onscreen.

frames him for murder as punishment for sleeping with her and then dismissing her. Although Lex maintains his innocence for the murder throughout, he does make analogies between this violence and his (albeit non-physically harmful) casual, sexist disregard of women. Even his supposed friend Clark is suspicious as to whether he is telling the truth about the murder, suggesting that Lex could be capable of such misogynist behaviour.

Not only are parallels made between the two Lexes, but also between Lex and other central men in the series. Chloe, who by season four heavily suspects that Clark has superpowers, continually makes connections between the two Lexes and hidden identities more widely. Lana also makes parallels between Lex's erratic behaviour and the behaviour of both Clark, whose secrecy prevented the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two in season three, and her current boyfriend, Jason, who she has recently discovered has also been withholding the truth from her. Although these parallels are not explicitly about the relationship between normative masculinity and violence, it is notable that they all pertain to *men* in the series. These parallels between secret identities and hidden inner selves become increasingly pronounced as the narrative continues and Lex discovers that Clark has superpowers.

The separation between the two Lexes is hard to maintain. After Lex is made whole again, Clark tells him that 'it really wasn't you'. As Lex apologises, he says, 'I'm sorry for what I...he put you through', quickly correcting his mistake and creating a disjuncture between himself and the 'evil' Lex. Yet, as the camera pulls in on his troubled facial expression, melancholy non-diegetic music plays and he questions, 'did the accident create an evil Lex or is that what's really inside of me?' Notably, Lex (seemingly) has no memory of what he has done. In the final scene, a shot/reverse shot structure captures a conversation between Lex and his father, Lionel. Lionel tells Lex that 'a man can't deny his true nature', reasoning that 'we're Luthors'. The episode ends on a sinister, unsettling note with a lingering extreme close up of Lex. He remains largely inscrutable, but very faintly smiles. Accompanying discordant non-diegetic music intensifies the ominous atmosphere, leaving doubt as to whether the 'evil' Lex has really been destroyed.

The mystery in 'Onyx' hinges on the relationship between Lex's 'normal' self and his sexually and physically violent behaviour as 'evil' Lex. This is characteristic of sexual violence narratives in *Buffy* and *Smallville* more widely in which the mystery-to-be-solved is not a conventional 'whodunnit' (as it is in *Veronica Mars* and in the singular *Beverly Hills* episode), but rather centres around the perpetrator's core identity. This is heightened in the case of storylines in which the perpetrator of sexual violence is possessed when they commit crimes. It remains debatable in 'Onyx' whether Lex was fully conscious and, thus, culpable when he harassed Lana. The ambiguous ending facilitates polysemic readings of

his abusive behaviour. Nevertheless, the episode makes it difficult to view sexual violence as an isolated aberration of an otherwise functioning patriarchy.

Boyle argues that, 'if man and monster cannot be so easily separated...then rape and other forms of gendered violence must be understood in relation to normative constructions of masculinity' (2005a: 192). She makes the argument in relation to *Buffy*, explaining that, in this series, there is a 'recognition of what men as a group stand to gain from violence' (2005b: 41). It is important to note here that episodic narratives, while self-contained, do not occur in vacuums. The wider context of a particular series alters how these storylines are framed. Indeed, Boyle's argument applies more to *Buffy* than *Smallville*, which typically resolves episodes by presenting individualised understandings of male sexual violence. In 'Onyx' Lex's behaviour is ultimately connected more to his status as a Luthor than a man. Furthermore, as Jes Battis argues, the end of 'Bound', the aforementioned episode in which Lex's mistreatment of women is emphasised, 'recuperates Lex...as a tragic figure whose own sexism emerges from his complex problems with intimacy (rather than from the patriarchal atmosphere that inflects more of *Smallville*'s gender relations...)' (2006). It is also worth noting that in the Superman series, more widely, Lex is Clark's nemesis and, thus, the viewer arguably knows that Lex will ultimately assume the role of villain. In this way, connections between normative constructions of masculinity in *Smallville* and sexual violence are limited.

Happy Endings?: Narrative and Ideological Patterns

Despite these differences in how sexual violence functions narratively, ideological patterns emerge across these self-contained episodes. Regardless of when individual episodes aired or their generic hybridity, sexual violence is largely framed as a personal concern for the teenage characters, rather than a wider-reaching social or political problem. The closure demanded by the episodic narrative form means that only tenuous solutions are offered to the problem of sexual violence and there is rarely any interrogation of the gendered social structures that enable and permit this type of abuse. This emphasis on the personal rather than the social is indicative of the genre more widely. As Davis and Dickinson argue, 'these programmes as a whole express key cultural concerns through this model of personal, psychological plight, rather than proposing the possibility for large, macro-political or societal change' (2004: 6).

Yet, importantly, with the exception of sexual-violence-as-a-mystery-to-be-solved episodes which I shall look at later, in these episodes sexual violence is not just framed as a personal problem, it is framed as a young *woman*'s personal problem. Even in episodes

that set out to portray sexual violence as a social issue, this abuse is framed through the experience of an individual female character, such as Kelly in *Beverly Hills*. These personal experiences are removed from the broader gendered social structures that enable and permit male sexual violence against women. Instead, in the lead up to the sexual attack, the narrative relentlessly focuses on these female victims alone, emphasising what they were wearing, drinking, doing at the time of the assault. This narrative scrutiny of the female victim is notable when compared to the treatment of victims of other kinds of physical (nonsexual) violence across the genre. For example, when a teenage character is physically abused by their parent or guardian - Rickie in *My So-Called Life*, Pacey in *Dawson's Creek* - the narrative does not dwell on their actions prior to the abuse. This emphasis on the female victim of sexual violence in these narratives resonates with the findings of scholarship on news discourses of this abuse, which note that women are often blamed for the violence used against them (see Carter and Weaver, 2003: 36-41 for a fuller discussion).

Sexual violence, then, becomes something that is about women, not something that is done by men. Male perpetrators of sexual violence are presented as shadowy figures in these episodes, disappearing shortly after committing the violent act, never to return. As undeveloped, marginal, often nameless characters, these men - unlike their victims - are not held accountable for their sexually violent actions and receive no punishment other than a punch from a protective male. The reasons for their behaviour go unquestioned, presenting a notion of male sexuality as natural, unstoppable and somehow detached from the male in question.

At the same time, distinctions are made between these perpetrators and 'normal' central male teenagers in these programmes. Perpetrators are often depicted in unfamiliar settings at night, shrouded in shadow. When Peyton meets Gabe in *One Tree Hill*, for instance, he is sitting alone in a dimly lit room on the margins of a busy party. These men are also typically emotionally inexpressive and lack remorse for their actions, appealing to central male characters for understanding by claiming that the sexual encounter was consensual. Importantly, these central males never respond with any sympathy. Sexual violence is, thus, presented as the result of an individual bad man who cannot read sexual signals properly.

This individualised understanding of sexual abuse renders the gendered sexual inequalities underlying these attacks largely invisible. As Moorti observes, albeit in relation to another genre, 'rape becomes an occasion for the critique of "bad" masculinity and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity' (2002: 133). Indeed, in these episodes, although it is women who typically stop the actual attack, sexual violence often becomes

an arena for the performance of ideal hegemonic masculinity as these central males defend and protect female victims. Significantly, although they use violence to do so, it is marked as distinct from the perpetrator's sexually violent actions, legitimated instead as heroic and chivalrous. Moreover, in keeping with the findings of feminist television scholarship on fictional rape representations more widely, it is these men who commonly espouse feminist definitions of sexual violence, further recuperating masculinity. It is Dylan, not Kelly's female friends, who makes a pro-feminist speech in *Beverly Hills* and Lucas, not Brooke, who comforts Peyton in *One Tree Hill*. Additionally, in sexual-violence-as-a-catalyst-for-romance episodes, the emphasis on heterosexual romance following sexual attacks further restores the desirability of hegemonic constructions of gendered sexuality. By disguising the relationship between normative constructions of masculinity and sexual violence, the programmes are able to ignore wider questions relating to gender, sexuality and power.

Supernatural series operate differently, potentially challenging these divisions between 'normal' men and perpetrators of sexual violence. This makes it difficult to view sexual violence solely as the domain of an individual bad man and foregrounds the relationship between dominant constructions of masculinity and violence. In *Smallville*, for example, although the monsters or sub-humans usually appear visually monstrous in the pre-credit sequence, as the narrative unfolds, they often retain their human visage and many of their human characteristics. In 'Metamorphosis', Greg exhibits similar sexually threatening behaviour before and after his transformation. Further, both *Buffy* and *Smallville* occasionally position central males in sexually violent roles and interrogate notions of 'core' identities. By doing so, they raise important questions about culpability and make it difficult to simply write off sexual violence as the domain of an individual bad man or monster. Even though this culpability is often later erased by the fact that central males are typically possessed when they commit sexually violent acts, nevertheless, these episodes frequently end on unsettling, ambiguous notes which potentially facilitate a counter-hegemonic understanding of sexual violence.

Regardless of the generic hybridity of individual programmes, moments of sexual violence are similarly fleeting on-screen. In all the programmes, supernatural or otherwise, shadowy lighting, rapid editing, the use of tight close ups and/or heavy movement within the frame make it difficult to discern what is actually happening in the few seconds of screen-time before the attack is interrupted. Moreover, with the exception of social issue storylines, after the sexual violence has taken place, the narrative shifts sharply away to focus on other issues, such as a budding romance or climatic battle sequence.

These narrative diversions often mean that the emotional and physical aftermath of the abuse on the victim is rendered largely invisible. Moorti refers to the 'absent presence'

of sexual violence in televisual fictional narratives that use this abuse to highlight other issues, explaining that by doing so, the violence committed on the victim's body is marginalised (2002: 118). As illustrated by Rayanne and Peyton, the victim often suffers from alcohol or drug-induced amnesia following the assault, thereby allowing programmes to side-step this issue altogether. Even 'Halloween', which allows space for Kelly to describe her emotional response to the attempted rape, still ends on a positive note, with the teenagers, including Kelly, happily socialising, seemingly largely unaffected by the episode's events.

This tonal jump from the seriousness of Kelly's attempted rape to the teenagers happily socialising is characteristic of the genre and fictional television formats more widely, which often feature tonal inconsistencies. As noted in Chapter 4, in teen drama series each episode features two or three interweaving storylines often with different tonal registers. For example, in 'Halloween' the attempted rape narrative is intercut with romantic and comedic storylines. While these interruptions create suspense by delaying the resolution of the sexual violence storyline, at the same time these sudden tonal diversions also potentially distract viewers from the serious issue in hand.

This chapter has focused on one of two dominant narrative forms of sexual violence storylines: the self-contained episode. Episodic issue-led narratives are often discussed by teen and feminist television scholars as the 'bad other' to overarching narratives, for failing to deal with issues in sufficient depth. Social issue or problem-of-the-week episodes have often been singled out for being particularly simplistic. However, what my analysis has revealed is that these narratives offer a rare space to directly engage with the topic of sexual violence, rather than using it to highlight another theme or issue. Further, I have revealed that episodic sexual violence narratives in supernatural series potentially facilitate counter-hegemonic understandings of sexual violence by foregrounding the relationship between hegemonic constructions of masculinity and sexual violence. In the following chapter, I explore sexual violence narratives that span multiple episodes and question whether their longer narrative form necessarily allows for a more complex engagement with the topic of sexual violence.

Chapter Six

Previously On...: Overarching Sexual Violence Narratives in US Teen Drama Series

Introduction

As aforementioned in Chapter 5, teen television scholars are typically derisive about the ability of episodic narratives to deal with issues such as sexual violence in sufficient complexity, favouring instead serial structure. However, despite this assertion little work has been carried out on issue-led story-arcs in teen series. Chapter 2 indicates that feminist scholarship on fictional televisual representations of sexual violence has similarly largely neglected serial structure, focusing instead on episodes in isolation. Mayne's (1988) essay on *L.A. Law* is an exception. As discussed in Chapter 2, she considers how feminist questions, including those involving sexual violence, are given narrative shape and definition within the series' format. Yet *L.A. Law*, like most legal dramas, predominantly features episodic storylines. This chapter will explore and situate sexual violence narratives that span more than one episode within broader series' structures. This then provides a context for a more detailed analysis of how sexual violence functions narratively and ideologically.

I will firstly outline the findings of my timeline research, drawing on Feuer's (1995) work on serial melodrama in order to theorise the notion of a story-arc. As the genre is primarily concerned with romantic, heterosexual, teenage relationships, sexual violence storylines are almost always embedded within this context. How this abuse affects these relationships is often of fundamental importance. In turn, this positioning affects how the narratives are framed. I will explore how sexual violence functions both narratively and ideologically across US series using textual examples from *Friday Night Lights*, *The O.C.*, *One Tree Hill*, *Beverly Hills* and *Dawson's Creek*, before offering some conclusions.

Sexual Violence and Narrative and Series' Structures

There is a repeated emphasis in television scholarship, not just of teen series, on the ability of serial forms to achieve greater characterisation and narrative complexity (Hammond, 2005: 80; G. Smith, 2005, 2006; Jacobs, 2005; Henderson, 2007). Yet, although several of these scholars refer to story arcs in their work, few theorise the term. Feuer is an exception. In her work on the rise of serial form in US prime-time melodramas

of the 1980s, she distinguishes between ‘arc’ shows that use short-term (ten to twelve episode) storylines alongside continuing storylines involving main characters and ‘multiple storyline shows’, that combine elements of the arc and the soap, with some storylines remaining unresolved (1995: 112). US teen drama series fluctuate between these two types. Homophobic abuse storylines tend to be tight, linear narratives that focus only on that issue (see seasons two and five of *Dawson’s Creek* for examples). Longer sexual violence narratives exist somewhere in between ‘arc’ and ‘multiple storyline’ shows. As Michael Hammond argues, US quality dramas are characterised by ‘both the serial format of the long story arc with open storylines and their combination with the shorter, more contained plot-lines that come to an end within one episode’ (2005: 80). While I do not want to enter into another debate on ‘quality’ here (see Chapter 2), his description is the most fitting of US teen drama series. In these longer narratives, some episodes tightly follow the sexual violence storyline, others feature only minor continuities and others still are purely episodic, ignoring the storyline altogether. I look at narrative complexity in more detail in the following chapter.

Eight out of the eleven US series feature overarching sexual violence narratives and there are twenty-seven in total.⁵⁵ As indicated in the table in chapter three (p.77), five of these series contain one to three narratives and *Buffy*, *Veronica Mars* and *Beverly Hills* contain four or more. *Beverly Hills* contains the most, with eight in total. Overarching sexual violence storylines only appear from the mid 1990s onwards. The first can be found in season five of *Beverly Hills* (episodes 522 - 524), which aired in 1995, when the teenagers are at university (I discuss this storyline later in this chapter). In the other teen series, these overarching narratives are more common in earlier seasons when characters are still at high school, but do not appear for the first time until the end of season one or later. This pattern can be attributed to the fact that these narratives are often accompanied by shifts in style (e.g. cliffhangers, a disruption of time, pacy editing), which require viewers to be familiar with the series’ norms for full dramatic impact (see Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion).

⁵⁵ *My So-Called Life*, *Freaks and Geeks* and *Gossip Girl* contain none. Over-arching sexual violence narratives only appear from 1995 and, thus, *My So-Called Life* features only episodic storylines. As discussed in Chapter 5, *Freaks and Geeks* is primarily a comedic series and, thus, features no sexual violence storylines. *Gossip Girl* contains a narrative in which Serena is blackmailed by a female peer over a sex tape that was made without her knowledge. The man in the tape (who was also complicit in the filming) died from a drug overdose while the camera was running. Significantly, this narrative is framed not as sexualised blackmail, but as a storyline about murder. I have not termed the blackmail ‘sexual violence’ because the fear that Serena expresses in this storyline is not based on any sexual threat, but on her (ill-founded) belief that she was complicit in the man’s death.

There is a direct correlation between the type of sexual violence depicted, the number of episodes that the narrative spans and where it is positioned within the wider series' structure, suggesting that there are distinctions in these programmes over these depictions. Homophobic abuse narratives are typically shorter than those involving other forms of sexual abuse. In *Dawson's Creek*, which features two of these types of narratives, the storylines span just two to three episodes and occur mid season. In contrast, stalking narratives, while also occurring mid season, stretch across five to sixteen episodes. Rape and attempted rape narratives are the most common, with five of each (Table 6.1). These storylines rarely span less than nine episodes and occupy the most significant position in series, coinciding with season finales and often stretching across seasons. Significantly, the actual moment of sexual violence occurs before the finale, in the season's penultimate episode or earlier, suggesting that this abuse is not these storylines' main concern. As I shall explore in the following section, the type of sexual violence also determines how the narrative unfolds (see Appendix B for more detail).

Type of Sexual Violence	Victim Protagonist	Victim Central Character	Victim Marginal Character	Perpetrator Protagonist	Perpetrator Central Character	Perpetrator Marginal Character
Stalking		F 4				M 4
Rape	F 2	F 3			M 1	M 3
Attempted Rape	F 1	F 4			M 1	M 4
Sexual Harassment	F 2	F 1			M 1	M 2
Child Sexual Abuse		F 1 / M 1				M 2
Sexualised Murder		F 1	F 3			M 4
Homophobic Abuse		F 1 / M 2				M 2 / ?
Dating Violence		F 1				M 1
Forced Prostitution			F 1			M 1

Table 6.1 Type of sexual violence and role of victim/perpetrator in US overarching narratives

As the above table indicates, with few exceptions, central females occupy the victim role and, like the episodic sexual violence narratives discussed in the previous chapter, the perpetrator is almost always a marginal male character. The ‘?’ in relation to the perpetrator of a homophobic abuse narrative refers to a storyline from season two of *Dawson’s Creek*, in which the culprit of the abuse remains anonymous. In five narratives, the victim is a female protagonist – these examples refer to *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*. These two programmes feature other significant differences to the others discussed in this thesis in that they are also the only series to feature central males in the role of perpetrator in relation to overarching storylines. Because of these differences, I look at them separately in the following chapter.

There are only three narratives where males are the victims of sexual violence. Two are homophobic abuse narratives – both occurring in *Dawson’s Creek* and featuring homosexual teen, Jack, as victim – and the other is a child sexual abuse narrative from season two of *Veronica Mars*. While there are storylines involving the sexual harassment of central male characters by marginal females, as noted in Chapter 2, these are characterised by a distinct lack of fear on the male’s part and, as such, I have not defined them as sexual violence.⁵⁶ As I discuss later in this chapter, this absence of fear is inextricably linked to the genre’s dominant portrayal of male sexuality, outlined in Chapter 4.

In the previous chapter I argued that in episodic storylines the narrative quickly diverts away from the issue of sexual violence, thereby often obscuring both perpetrator and victim. With the exception of sexual-violence-as-social-issue episodes, the aftermath on the victim is rarely explored and the perpetrator disappears following the attack. In contrast, both the victim and perpetrator are much more prominent in overarching sexual violence narratives. Much more emphasis is placed on the emotional aftermath of the abuse on the victim in these storylines and although perpetrators remain marginal figures who exist outside the core community, they are afforded, in varying degrees, more sympathy and often have (albeit largely undeveloped) back stories. The viewer is discouraged from identifying with them, but reasons, however tenuous, are often suggested for their behaviour.

In attempted rape narratives, the actual moment of sexual violence usually occurs in the first episode of the over-arching storyline (see *Friday Night Lights* episode 120 ‘Mud Bowl’ or *The O.C.* episode 221 ‘Return of the Nana’ for examples). Like the

⁵⁶ For examples, see season two of *Beverly Hills* (216 ‘My Desperate Valentine’), season five of *One Tree Hill* (506 ‘Don’t Dream It’s Over’) and season five of *Dawson’s Creek* (520 ‘Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)’).

attempted rape storylines discussed in Chapter 5, this moment is fleeting, occupying barely a minute of screen time before it is interrupted and/or the victim manages to escape. It is characterised by mobile camerawork, fast editing and tight facial close ups of the victim that highlight her fear. Her protests are also clearly audible. With homophobic abuse narratives, the violence is non-physical, taking the form of malicious verbal rumours and/or homophobic graffiti spray-painted on a locker door. Again, the victim's fear is emphasised. The following episodes focus on the aftermath of the abuse on the victim and those around them. Unlike the narratives in Chapter 5 which typically feature happy endings, these storylines lack closure, instead fading out as the victim's fear subsides and other storylines take precedence.

Stalking narratives operate differently (see season one of *The O.C.* or season four of *One Tree Hill* for examples). The sexual violence is initially implicit. Often viewers are more aware of the threat certain characters pose than their victims, having witnessed them peering voyeuristically through windows or lurking outside houses. The narrative slowly builds to a climax, coinciding with the sexual violence becoming explicitly sexual and physical. Despite these differences in narrative length, though, sexual violence is still framed as a personal concern. The police remain uninvolved unless they are personally connected to the victim and the judicial or medical aftermath of sexually violent attacks is rarely explored.

How the storyline is positioned in relation to romantic relationships affects the kinds of stories told about sexual violence. In these overarching narratives, sexual violence functions in four main ways: as a catalyst for romance, for a break-up, to warn against the perils of choosing the wrong man (sexual violence follows the end of a relationship) and as a catalyst for coming out (see Appendix D).⁵⁷ Thus, with the exception of homophobic abuse storylines, these narratives all take place directly before, within or immediately after a romantic relationship. If sexual violence takes place within a romantic relationship, rarely does it survive. I will consider each of these functions in turn, drawing on textual examples to illustrate the narrative patterns of each type and also considering storylines that deviate from these norms. I then offer some conclusions.

⁵⁷ Notably, there are four storylines that do not fit with these dominant functions: a rape narrative from *Veronica Mars* (101- 222), a child abuse storyline from *Veronica Mars* (201-222), a sexualised violence narrative from *Buffy* (718- 722) and a storyline involving forced prostitution from *Beverly Hills* (809- 811).

Damsels and Knights: Sexual violence as advancing romance

LANDRY: Your knight in shining armour has arrived...

The above comment is jokily made by Landry, a central geeky male teenager in *Friday Night Lights*, to his friend, Tyra, when she calls him afraid that someone is lurking outside her house (121 'Best Laid Plans'). In the previous episode (120 'Mud Bowl'), a stranger dragged Tyra into his car and attempted to rape her. Landry's remark points to the function of sexual violence in these narratives as advancing romance between a central male and female victim by operating to create a space for the display of ideal masculinity in the form of chivalrous protection. Additionally, it indicates a central difference from these types of narratives and the similar storylines described in Chapter 5. Here it is the victim who becomes romantically involved following the attack.

As well as *Friday Night Lights*, there are three other sexual-violence-as-advancing-romance narratives across the eight series (see Appendix D). In this section, I will focus on the *Friday Night Lights* storyline as well as narratives from season five of *Beverly Hills* in which central female, Donna, is targeted by a serial rapist on the university campus and season four of *One Tree Hill*, in which Peyton is stalked by a man pretending to be her half-brother, Derek.

Despite focusing on different forms of sexual violence, the narratives follow a similar pattern. The moment of sexual violence is lengthier than the examples in Chapter 5 and is followed by episodes in which a central male teenage character comforts and protects the traumatised victim. The *Beverly Hills* storyline is relatively short, lasting only three episodes. The first episode introduces the threat of the campus rapist and in the second episode, the rapist targets Donna. Her ex-boyfriend, David, saves her from the attack by hitting the perpetrator with a baseball bat. In the third episode, David comforts Donna and they kiss. The *Friday Night Lights* and *One Tree Hill* narratives are longer. In these cases, as the victim's fear subsides, the narrative is overtaken by other storylines, disappearing altogether for several episodes, until a second narrative climax occurs when the victim is sexually attacked again by the same perpetrator. A second, shorter period of male comfort ensues and the narrative is resolved by, in *One Tree Hill*, the perpetrator's arrest or, in *Friday Night Lights*, death, when Landry murders him. The romance narrative begins in the first or second period of comfort, although neither couple has sex until after the threat has been quelled.

In all three programmes, the sexual threat comes from outside the teenage community and the moment of sexual violence is intercut with a significant event in the

series. This highlights the victim's vulnerability by stressing her spatial distance from her friends and, thus, from rescue. For example, in *Friday Night Lights*, the attempted rape is interwoven with a high school football game, the results of which determine if the town's team will enter the State championship. As the series is centred around the investment of the town, and specifically its teenagers, in this team, the editing and narrative structure heighten Tyra's vulnerability by foregrounding her distance from her friends and family at this crucial game. Furthermore, it marks her attacker as an outsider as he is not at the game.

In *Friday Night Lights*, the interweaving of twenty second attempted rape scenes with lengthier three minute game sequences enhances narrative tension by creating continual interruptions. Fast-paced editing and actor-led mobile camerawork, which is often one step behind the action, characterise the depiction of the attempted rape. In these short twenty second bursts, there is approximately one shot per second. The camera alternates between exterior shots, which place the viewer in a frustrating position behind the rain-slicked car windscreen, and shots of Tyra and her attacker inside the car. Her screams and protests as well as her attacker's gruff voice, point to the violence of the encounter. Yet, regardless of the positioning, the use of tight facial close ups and heavy movement within the frame as Tyra struggles make it hard to discern exactly what is happening. Eventually she escapes and the narrative cuts back to the football game.

The extreme physical violence of the attempted rape is further expressed through this interweaving with sports' scenes. The continuous noise of heavy rain and melancholy non-diegetic music links the sequences together with Tyra's screams intercut with the crowd's cheers, Coach Taylor's barked instructions, the disembodied sports' commentary and the thuds of bodies slamming together on the field. The juxtaposition of the violent attempted rape with male sports' aggression potentially offers a critique of the relationship between heterosexual masculinity and violence, by highlighting the widespread acceptance and celebration of displays of male violence. It is interesting that Landry is one of the few central males in the series that is not on the football team (at this stage, at least). Yet, this critique is undermined by the attacker's position *outside* of the community.

In all three narratives, sexual violence is immediately followed by scenes of male comfort. In *Friday Night Lights*, Landry arrives to find Tyra in the car park and holds her as she tearfully explains what happened. Again parallels are made between the event and the game, as the camera cuts from Landry's concerned reaction to the similar concern of the Coach just before the team win. The emotions and intensity of the crowd and team's celebrations as they erupt jubilantly is contrasted with Landry and Tyra sitting in silence, lending poignancy to the scene. Non-diegetic melancholy music plays softly in the background and the lack of dialogue is notable. Tyra stares sadly to the left of the frame,

her brow furrowed before the camera cuts to a concerned-looking Landry across the table. As he moves to sit next to her, the camera cuts to a close up of them holding hands, before panning up to reveal Tyra's tears (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 Tyra clings to Landry following an attempted rape in *Friday Night Lights* (120 'Mud Bowl').

As illustrated by the opening quote, the following episodes cast the victim as a subject in need of male protection, focusing on the emotional aftermath of the sexual violence on her. In turn, this recuperates ideals of masculinity as the central male soothes, instructs, comforts and protects her, echoing the findings of Cuklanz (2000), Projansky (2001) and Moorti (2002), who, as discussed in Chapter 2, argue that male characters are often portrayed as instructing females on the appropriate responses to sexual violence. Notably, none of the female victims in these three narratives is depicted with their female friends following their attack, thus denying any opportunity for a shared identity based on an awareness of gendered inequality. A shared gendered identity is further denied in *Beverly Hills* in which the other victims of the serial rapist are never depicted onscreen.

Indeed, in *Beverly Hills* the only characters to take action to protect female students from the campus rapist are the central males. Steve drives females around campus, so that they do not have to walk alone and Brandon, as student body president, speaks passionately on behalf of a group of women to urge the Dean to take measures to stop the rapes. Ideals of masculinity are further restored by David's heroic rescue of Donna. The theme of male protection is similarly emphasised in the *Friday Night Lights* storyline. In season two, Tyra is attacked again by the man who tried to rape her. This time, Landry is

present and physically protects her, accidentally killing the perpetrator in the process. Significantly, though, Landry's use of violence – like David's in *Beverly Hills* – is legitimated as heroic, used in self-defense to protect victims from particularly violent attackers. Indeed, he is later acquitted of murder on these grounds.

The *One Tree Hill* narrative also focuses on male protection. Having physically defended Peyton against her stalker's attempted rape in the previous episode, Lucas and her real brother, Derek, team up to help her overcome her fear and relinquish her victim role (406 'Where Did You Sleep Last Night?'). Derek is a marine and takes Peyton to his army base to teach her self defense, his army affiliation further restoring normative ideals of masculinity by connoting strength and bravery. She grows increasingly aggressive as he verbally goads her, calling her a 'weak, scared, defenseless little girl'. The camera cuts between close ups of Peyton boxing, often staring directly and confrontationally at the camera, and flashbacks to other moments of fear, pain and loss in her life, beginning and ending with her stalker's attack. The other flashbacks include the death of loved ones and a fight with Brooke, but notably not her experience of attempted rape outlined in Chapter 5. Thus, although the narrative places heavy emphasis on Peyton's fear and pain following the attack, the sexual specificity of the incident is downplayed. At the end of the scene, Peyton collapses tearfully in her brother's arms.

The theme of male protection continues until the end of the episode. Overhead shots of Peyton lying in bed, too afraid to turn out the light, are layered with Lucas' seemingly omniscient voice-over that closes almost every episode in early seasons of the series by outlining its main themes. Here he emphasises the importance of facing fears. Traditionally connoting authority, this male voice-over places Lucas in a position of power over Peyton, who has little agency. Indeed, outside her brother guards her home without her knowledge after he and Lucas decide it is better for her to confront her fears alone. In the next episode, he leaves and Peyton declares her love for Lucas who later reciprocates, further restoring gendered ideals of heterosexual romance.

The characterisation and representation of perpetrators of sexual violence in these narratives draw heavily on horror conventions, dissociating them from 'normal' men. Not only do they lurk in shadows, jumping out at their victims unexpectedly, but they are relentless in their sexual pursuit, incredibly violent and near indestructible as illustrated by the second sexual attack in *One Tree Hill*. As discussed in Chapter 4, episode 415 ('Prom Night at Hater High') ends on a cliffhanger as Peyton opens her front door in her prom dress, expecting Lucas, only to find her stalker. The following episode (416 'You Call it Madness, I Call it Love') picks up where the previous one left off. Unlike other moments of sexual violence in the genre, his attack spans almost the whole episode, intercut with

scenes at the prom. Like the *Friday Night Lights* narrative, this structure enhances Peyton's vulnerability by highlighting her geographical distance from her friends, as well as creating constant interruptions that draw out her fear, flight and battle against her stalker.

This storyline draws heavily on the conventions of the slasher film genre, also dominated by teens, in which the home is often the site of danger.⁵⁸ Yet, as Chapter 4 indicates, Peyton's home is rendered strange by the use of mobile camerawork, distorted camera angles, dim lighting and the use of unfamiliar spaces within the family home (e.g. the basement and hallway). Much of the attack takes place in the never-before-seen dimly lit basement where Peyton and later Brooke, who leaves the prom to check on her friend, remain bound and gagged for half the episode. Facial close ups highlight their fear. The attack is explicitly violent and sexual from the outset, with the fake 'Derek' punching Peyton when she opens the door and proceeding to set up a 'private prom' in the basement after which, he informs her, they will go upstairs and have the 'perfect prom night'.

Halfway through the episode, Peyton manages to escape and plunge a knife into her stalker's chest. From then on, the camera follows him as he searches for Peyton. The viewer is aligned with his point of view as he opens her bedroom door to find an empty room, yet far from promoting identification (he is, afterall, psychotic), it enhances the narrative tension by raising the question of where Peyton is. Suddenly she reveals herself and a fight ensues. This occurs three-quarters of the way through the episode, illustrating just how much emphasis is placed on her fear before this point. As is characteristic of sexual violence narratives across the genre more widely, just as he captures Peyton, pushes her onto the bed and climbs on top of her, Brooke enters wielding a golf club.

Ultimately, it is Brooke and Peyton's intimate friendship that allows them to overcome Peyton's stalker, as they use coded language and moves from a past cheerleading camp to catch him off guard and knock him unconscious. Indeed, this second moment of sexual violence operates more as a catalyst to restore their turbulent friendship than for romance with Lucas, heightened by the theme of friendship running through other characters' narratives in the episode. Again 'Derek' is distanced from 'normal' men through Brooke's explicit acknowledgement of horror conventions, warning Peyton to 'be careful, they always lunge', just before he does just that (Figure 6.2).

⁵⁸ Several actors from teen drama series feature in these films, such as Sarah Michelle Gellar (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*) and Neve Campbell from *Party of Five* (*Scream*).



Figure 6.2 Monstrous ‘Derek’ lunges again in *One Tree Hill* (416 ‘You Call it Madness, I Call it Love’).

After the attack, Brooke suggests that their usual catchphrase ‘hos over bros’ (translating as female friendship over boyfriends) be changed to ‘hos over psychos’. In keeping with horror movie conventions, little motivation is offered for ‘Derek’'s behaviour. Peyton and Brooke visit him in prison in a later episode (418 ‘The Runaway Found’) and learn that his former girlfriend, who died on prom night, resembled Peyton, but that does not explain his incredibly sexual and violent actions. However, the potential for a collective gendered identity based on the prevalence of male violence against women is undermined in the episode directly following the attack which opens with Brooke and Peyton sleeping in Lucas’ bed, too afraid to sleep alone (417 ‘It Gets Worst At Night’). Peyton and Lucas also have sex (off-screen) for the first time in this episode and from then on their relationship overshadows the sexual violence narrative.

Narratives in which sexual violence operates to advance teenage romance function similarly to those in Chapter 5. However, here it is the victim who is incorporated into the romance plot. In these overarching storylines, attempted rape operates as a site for the display of ideal masculinity as central male characters comfort and physically protect female victims. This behaviour then prompts a romantic relationship between the two, recuperating gendered ideals of romance. Hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality further remain untroubled by the dissociation of sexually violent males from ‘normal’ male characters. In this way, these narratives portray sexual violence as an isolated problem of an otherwise fully-functioning patriarchy.

Wise men and wild women: sexual violence as frustrating romance

In the aforementioned *One Tree Hill* narrative, Lucas senses that ‘Derek’ is not to be trusted and tries to warn Peyton, who dismisses his concerns. This kind of male intuition is particularly common in sexual violence narratives in which the abuse operates to frustrate a romantic relationship. Sexual-violence-as-frustrating-romance narratives occur predominantly in *Beverly Hills*, with five in total, as well as in *The O.C.* and *Veronica Mars*. These storylines emphasise the effect that sexual violence has on these relationships. At the beginning of these narratives the couple’s love is emphasised by shots of them kissing passionately and joking intimately. Within the same episode, a new character is introduced who, although appearing pleasant at first, will ultimately turn out to be the perpetrator of the sexual violence that disturbs the romantic equilibrium. The abuse typically takes the form of stalking or attempted rape, growing increasingly sexual and physical as the narrative unfolds. Following a physical attack, the couple’s relationship comes under strain because the victim’s boyfriend is either hurt that she did not take his initial warning seriously or listen to his instructions on how to deal with the aftermath of sexual violence. Thus, although sexual violence functions in the opposite way to the previous narratives discussed, it has a similar outcome; to restore male authority in a teenage version of a ‘father knows best’ scenario. (Interestingly, victims tend to have absent fathers and thus, their boyfriend takes on a paternal role.)

In the *Beverly Hills* storyline, Donna is the recipient of obscene, sexually threatening phone calls, which start after she appears as a weather girl on the university’s television station. The phone calls coincide with Garrett Slan, the serial rapist from the season five narrative discussed in the previous section, being released from prison. This prompts Donna to believe he is the culprit. The narrative is unusual in the context of the genre more widely in that it directly establishes links between these obscene phone calls and Donna’s earlier attempted rape. Although the same females often occupy the victim role repeatedly – Marissa in *The O.C.*, Peyton in *One Tree Hill* - it is rare that connections are explicitly made across storylines. In *Beverly Hills* these connections are not only established through the figure of Garrett, but also by Donna’s fear. Indeed, she experiences several flashbacks to her earlier attack, which serve to emphasise the long-term effects of sexual violence as well as to create connections between different forms of sexually abusive behaviour, linking them on the basis of her fear of what may happen next.

Notably, Donna's female friends are relatively unsupportive of her response to the phone calls, believing that she is over-reacting. Instead, it is her boyfriend, David, who supports and comforts her, accompanying her to the courthouse to file a restraining order on Garrett and, when this fails, physically threatening him. However, as Donna's fear becomes more intense, David grows increasingly frustrated at his inability to help her and the couple drift apart. Indeed, when Donna's stalker is revealed as her classmate, Evan, and he holds her hostage at gunpoint in the university's television studio, it is Brandon, not David, who helps her escape (719 'We Interrupt this Program').

The following episode takes place on Valentine's Day (720 'My Funny Valentine') and focuses on Donna and David's relationship problems as well as those of the rest of the ensemble cast. David is frustrated by Donna's refusal to get out of bed following her attack and his inability to comfort her. This is exasperated when Donna's fire-fighter ex-boyfriend arrives and manages to cheer her up. David's jealousy is pronounced, exclaiming, 'I've been trying to cheer you up for days and in walks Rescue 911 and you're doing cartwheels!' What is notable about this storyline is that the sexual specificity of Donna's attack is downplayed. Instead, their relationship problems take precedence and are framed as ones about trust and jealousy. While the aftermath of Donna's attack is touched upon by her reluctance to leave the house at the start of the episode, it is quickly forgotten as their relationship problems take over.

A stalking narrative from season one of *The O.C.* focuses explicitly on the theme of male protection. This storyline becomes reconfigured as a narrative about men, specifically Ryan's mistrust of his girlfriend, Marissa's, new friend, Oliver (Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3 Ryan's mistrust of Oliver is highlighted in *The O.C.* (117 'The Rivals').

Ryan drives the narrative forward, obsessed with proving that Oliver is dangerous. His concern for Marissa increases when Oliver cryptically mentions that he left his previous school because of an 'incident' (117 'The Rivals'). As indicated by the episode's title,

sexual violence storylines across *The O.C.* more widely are centrally about male competition, as I will explore in the following sections.⁵⁹ Clinic's 'Come into our room' is used as a non-diegetic musical motif underscoring Ryan's investigation of Oliver. The pulsing drum beat, rapid tempo and minor, staccato piano notes increase the urgency as he breaks into the school to read Oliver's personal file and steals a private letter between Marissa and Oliver. In doing so, he discovers that Oliver has a history of suicidal behaviour motivated by sexual obsession. As the narrative unfolds, Ryan's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic, culminating in Marissa dumping him because she can no longer trust him and a violent attack on Oliver. The narrative focuses too on the reactions of the ensemble cast to Ryan's behaviour, almost all of whom condemn his actions. The viewer, however, knows Ryan's mistrust is well-founded, having witnessed Oliver lurking outside Ryan's house voyeuristically watching Marissa in an earlier episode (115 'The Third Wheel'). As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, this prior knowledge alters how viewers' interpret storylines. Here it at least partially legitimates Ryan's actions.

Crucially, like the *Beverly Hills* narrative, this storyline is reconfigured as less about sexual violence and more about romantic relationships and issues of trust. Ultimately Ryan's response is prioritised and Marissa ends up apologising to him for not trusting him. The narrative allows her no space to express anger or pain at being attacked or taken advantage of, marginalising the sexual violence inflicted upon her. In turn, because Ryan's suspicions turn out to be correct and the threat comes from outside the relationship, both male authority and constructions of heterosexual romance remain intact.

Trust is also central to a later storyline in *The O.C.*, in which Marissa is almost raped by Ryan's brother, Trey, while dating Ryan. The attempted rape follows interweaving narratives involving infidelity and afterwards Trey tries to frame it as consensual to Ryan who suspects the two may be having an affair (221 'Return of the Nana'). Yet it is clearly positioned as violent and unwanted. It occurs when Ryan is in Miami, therefore, like the *Friday Night Lights* and *One Tree Hill* narratives discussed in the previous section, Marissa's vulnerability is heightened by her distance from her usual protector. Marissa and Trey spend time together while Ryan is away, drinking margaritas to celebrate Trey's new job. Growing increasingly drunk, and slightly uncomfortable with Trey staring at her, Marissa suggests they go for a walk on the beach to get some air. As she leaves, the camera lingers on Trey secretly snorting cocaine. The emphasis on the perpetrator's behaviour prior to the attack is notably unusual for all types of sexual

⁵⁹ Marissa's attempted rape in season two becomes a story about Ryan's competition with his brother and her sexually-motivated death in season three becomes reconfigured as Ryan's quest to hunt down her killer.

violence narratives in the genre, although here it suggests that sexual violence is the outcome of drug use rather than dominant constructions of gendered sexuality that promote male dominance and female submission.

On the beach Trey's behaviour is erratic, indicating the effects of the drug. He howls and swings Marissa around before grabbing her and telling her, 'I've seen the way you look at me'. Marissa appears shocked. Mobile camerawork and quick editing enhances the dramatic tension as she tries to escape his grip. The attack is explicitly framed as a result of his class-related inferiority complex, angrily asking, 'What, am I not good enough for you?!', before knocking her to the ground. The camera cuts quickly between long shots of him lying on top of her and facial close ups of each, his aggression and her fear highlighted, before she hits him with a log and runs off. Again, unusually the camera lingers on Trey as he moans frustratedly, raises his fists in the air and sinks to his knees with his head in his hands. In the following scene the camera further emphasises Trey's reaction to the failed rape. Ryan phones Marissa and the camera cuts to her phone lying discarded in the sand. Trey picks it up and stares at it. In a lingering side profile long shot he appears upset and preoccupied, no longer threatening.

Marissa keeps the attempted rape a secret for the next two episodes and thus, the narrative remains singularly focused on her emotional response. She is visibly afraid of Trey, avoiding him when possible and experiences flashbacks when kissing Ryan (222 'The Showdown'). In this scene the viewer is positioned beside Marissa's head as they kiss, yet emphasising the traumatic aftermath of the rape, the camera cuts between her kissing Ryan and Trey aggressively kissing her. The non-diegetic sound of waves and dialogue from the beach further express her fear and pain before she pushes Ryan off and flees the room. As outlined in Chapter 4, teen drama series use flashbacks sparingly, thus heightening the dramatic tension of this scene.

Later in the same episode, Trey apologises to her and she angrily responds, 'Me? Me? What about Ryan? He's your brother!'. From this point on, the storyline becomes largely reconfigured as one involving fraternal rivalry. Indicating this narrative shift away from sexual violence, the season finale features a climatic fight between Ryan and Trey, resulting in Marissa shooting Trey to protect Ryan (224 'The Dearly Beloved'). From the start of season three onwards, this shooting, which is notably motivated by Marissa's love of Ryan and not her anger at Trey, takes precedence and the attempted rape is overlooked. Indeed, season three takes place months in the future, allowing the programme to sidestep Marissa's trauma. Ryan and Marissa remain together and have sex for the first time later in the season (303 'The End of Innocence'), but, ultimately, their relationship is unable to withstand the aftermath of the attempted rape and they break up.

In these narratives, the sexual violence occurs while the victim is in a relationship, yet the threat comes from an outside character, thereby leaving ideals of heterosexual romance untroubled. Both narratives in *The O.C.* allow the perpetrator slightly more back-story and, in turn, a degree of sympathy, but again, like the narratives discussed in the previous section as well as in Chapter 5, the perpetrator is marked as distinct from the series' central males. The emphasis on the aftermath on the victim varies. Both the *Beverly Hills* storyline and *The O.C.* narrative from season two use flashbacks to highlight the emotional effects of sexual violence on the victim. At the same time, though, the victim is not depicted with any of her female friends following the attack, thereby closing down the possibility for a shared gendered identity. Instead, male responses are privileged. The narrative shifts away from sexual violence to focus on the troubled romantic relationship between the couple, to which issues of trust are often central.

Angry exes: Sexual violence as a warning about the dangers of choosing the wrong man

In the previous section although sexual violence frustrates romantic relationships, hegemonic constructions of heterosexual romance remain in tact. This section considers sexual violence storylines that *follow* the end of relationships, thus, potentially rendering constructions of heterosexuality problematic. These types of narratives occur predominantly in series with heterosexual heroines. There are five in total across *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*, which I discuss further in the following chapter. Here, I look at a narrative from season three of *The O.C.*, in which Marissa – ever the victim – dies as a result of the frenzied sexual-possessiveness of her ex-lover, Volchok, who runs her off the road in a high-speed car chase (325 'The Graduates'). Marissa's death coincides with the season three finale and the aftermath stretches into season four. The shocking and serious outcome of this storyline in which the victim dies is found in two of these types of narratives in *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*.⁶⁰ These narratives are inextricably linked with the genre's dominant representations of gendered sexuality. In these storylines, sexual violence is framed as a warning about the perils of choosing the wrong man, resonating with the genre's portrayal of female sexuality as a much more dangerous and vulnerable space than male (see Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion).

The connection between these storylines and the genre's dominant portrayal of gendered sexuality becomes clearer through a comparative analysis of narratives in which

⁶⁰ See *Buffy* episode 613 'Dead Things' and an overarching sexual violence narrative in *Veronica Mars* involving her best friend's murder by her older lover (101- 222).

male teenagers are sexually harassed by ex-lovers. As noted in Chapter 2, I have not termed these narratives 'sexual violence' due to the absence of fear on the male's part. For example, in a two-part *Beverly Hills* storyline, Brandon separates from his girlfriend, Emily, after she slips him a drug without his consent while at a club (215 'U4EA'). In the following episode (216 'My Desperate Valentine'), she displays obsessive behaviour, phoning him and hanging up, leaving him presents and manipulating situations to be near him. Although polysemic readings of Emily's behaviour are enabled by the different perspectives of the ensemble cast - Brenda repeatedly distances Emily's behaviour from that of a normal ex-lover, stating clearly that 'this is about a fatal attraction', while the other females in the programme are, at least initially, sympathetic to Emily - Brandon expresses no emotion other than mild irritation. The genre's dominant portrayal of males as sexually ever-ready and willing further disguises Emily's harassment. For example, when she gets into bed with Brandon and starts to kiss him, he immediately reciprocates. Indeed, later in the series, Brandon and Emily rekindle their romantic relationship (412 'Radar Love', 413 'Emily', 513 'Up In Flames', 514 'Injustice for All').

The lack of danger that former female lovers pose in these types of storylines resonates with narratives in which males are sexually harassed more widely. In a *Dawson's Creek* storyline from season five, when Pacey is sexually harassed by his female boss (played by the classic television femme fatale, Sherilyn Fenn) again the abusive aspects of her behaviour, essentially telling him that she will only reconsider firing his girlfriend if he kisses her, are obscured by his attraction towards her (520 'Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)').⁶¹ In a scene marked as comedic by jaunty, non-diegetic music, Pacey confides in Jack. While he notes that he is 'the victim of unwanted sexual advances', he does so with a smirk prompting Jack to ask if his boss is hot (521 'After Hours'). This equation of male sexual attraction to women with women's power over men is problematic. It overlooks the female's sexually violent behaviour and leaves no room for male characters to experience any emotion other than bewildered arousal, reinforcing the myth that male sexuality is detached from the male in question. A similar pattern occurs in storylines in which male teenagers have sex with adult females.⁶²

The narrative from *The O.C.* is similarly linked to notions of gendered sexuality, but here it has a much more serious outcome, reflecting Byers' argument that females have more to lose from engaging in sexual activity than males (see Chapter 4 for a fuller

⁶¹ See also season five of *One Tree Hill* when Nathan is sexually harassed by (and simultaneously attracted to) his son's female nanny.

⁶² See Julie Cooper and Luke's relationship in season one of *The O.C.* or Pacey and Tamara's relationship in season one of *Dawson's Creek* for examples.

discussion). In this storyline, sexual violence is framed explicitly as the result of Marissa's poor choice of sexual partner. Volchok is coded as a 'bad boy' from the outset through his performance, appearance and the spaces he inhabits: he is heavily tattooed, perpetually swigging from a beer bottle or hip flask and lives in a dusty, dirty, sparsely furnished and dimly lit apartment. Further, like the other perpetrators of sexual violence discussed in this chapter, he is an outsider to the teenage community. Marissa begins dating and sleeping with him after her friend, Johnny, dies and, significantly, their relationship is portrayed as part of a long chain of self-destructive behaviour. During their relationship, Marissa is gradually drawn into drug and alcohol abuse and truancy as her friends and family despair.

This storyline shares many similarities with other sexual violence narratives in the programme. For example, even though Marissa and Ryan no longer date, the storyline once more casts her as the victim and him as her protector, as the narrative becomes reconfigured as a battle between men. This theme plays out across the storyline. Marissa ends her relationship with Volchok after catching him cheating on her at the prom. Shortly afterwards, it is discovered that the prom committee's money is missing. Ryan immediately and correctly suspects Volchok and a fight ensues between the two after Volchok makes a comment alluding to his sexual power over Marissa. Ryan beats Volchok until he is nearly unconscious, an event that Volchok then uses to blackmail Ryan into helping him steal a car and supply him with money. Marissa becomes involved when Volchok tells her that he will make Ryan's life 'real bad' if she does not see him. When Marissa refuses, Volchok becomes increasingly angry and a high speed car chase ensues which results in Marissa's death.

The chase sequence is highly dramatic, characterised by fast-paced editing, mobile camerawork, faint non-diegetic minor notes, the diegetic sound of screeching tyres, revving engines and Marissa's screams as Volchok rams their car repeatedly. Facial close ups emphasise Marissa's and Ryan's fear and Volchok's anger. As the pace of the editing and volume of music increase, Volchok rams the side of Ryan's car, sending him and Marissa careering off the roadside. The viewer is positioned from Marissa's point of view behind the windscreen as the car crashes down a steep hill onto a road below. The sounds of glass smashing, metal crunching and Volchok's tyres screeching as he drives off are amplified before the car comes to a halt and silence envelops the scene. The camera remains static, before cutting to a lingering close up of Ryan as he starts to move. Realising that the car is about to explode, he carries Marissa out and at this point, the non-diegetic opening strains of Imogen Heap's version of Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' are audible.

This song is significant, appearing earlier in the series to mark moments of pain and transition.⁶³

As Ryan walks away from the wreckage with Marissa in his arms, the scene is layered with ghostly images of past footage from the series', emphasising moments when Ryan protectively carried Marissa in a similar way⁶⁴ (Figures 6.4 and 6.5). The Christ-like iconography of this image enhances the notion of Marissa as a perpetually tragic figure who cannot escape her victimisation and, yet, it is Ryan who is cast in the role of sacrificial martyr, always coming to her rescue (and the rescue of other characters in the programme).⁶⁵ As the car explodes, the lyrics of the song, 'Baby I've been here before...', directly allude to this repetition. The scene is highly emotive. The music stops as the camera cuts between tight close ups of the two making Marissa's last breaths clearly audible. Ryan is framed alone, prioritising his emotional response, while Marissa is framed in his arms as she dies. The music restarts as the camera cuts between Ryan's tearful shock and scenes from the season one finale, when he watched Marissa as he was driven away, thus reiterating that this is a story about Ryan's grief rather than Marissa's death, the culmination of her abuse at Volchok's hands. Notably, as Marissa's death is not through Volchok's direct contact with her, he is written out of this death scene.

In a final long shot, Ryan is crumpled over Marissa's body as the camera slowly pulls further away to the final strains of 'Hallelujah'. Season four begins darkly and, like almost all sexual violence narratives in the series⁶⁶, the storyline becomes reconfigured as Ryan's quest to find and punish Volchok. Parallels are frequently made between Ryan and perpetrators of sexual violence in the series, based on his outsider status having only moved to Orange County in the pilot and, in relation to Trey and Volchok, his class. Yet, ultimately, he is marked as distinct from these men by his chivalrous, tolerant and kind behaviour. He talks Oliver out of committing suicide, visits Trey in hospital and in this case, allows Volchok to be arrested unharmed.

⁶³ Jeff Buckley's version was used at the end of season one when Ryan moved home, Marissa despaired and Seth ran away.

⁶⁴ See the pilot episode when Ryan found Marissa passed out on her front steps and 107 'The Escape', when Marissa overdoses on painkillers. Both of these scenes are linked by the non-diegetic music of Mazzy Star's 'Into Dust'.

⁶⁵ In 401 'The Avengers', Sandy remarks that Ryan saved the whole Cohen family in various ways, although notably this is never from sexual threats. Indeed, it is always Marissa who is the victim of sexual violence and notably not Summer, her feistier best friend.

⁶⁶ The one exception is a storyline in which Marissa's mother, Julie, is blackmailed with a pornographic video she starred in in the 1980s.



Figures 6.4 and 6.5 Christ-like poses as Ryan protectively carries Marissa in *The O.C.* episodes 107 'The Escape' and 325 'The Graduates', respectively.

Storylines in which sexual violence follows the end of romantic relationships are potentially the most provocative, explicitly rendering normative constructions of heterosexual romance problematic by positioning the sexual violence narrative immediately after the couple have broken up. However, in *The O.C.*, the distinction between Ryan and Volchok is significant. Ryan represents 'good' masculinity in his heroic attempts to protect Marissa, while Volchok represents 'bad' masculinity in his aggressive, and ultimately fatal, sexual possessiveness. This distinction means that connections between masculinity and sexual violence are largely disguised. Further, ideals of

heterosexual romance remain untroubled. Although sexual violence operates here as a warning about the dangers of choosing the wrong man, Ryan and Marissa's on/off romantic relationship, which is consistently portrayed in the series as desirable, despite its problems, remains in tact. Sexual violence is, thus, portrayed as the domain of an individual bad man.

It is notable that *The O.C.* is male-fronted. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, in the series more widely sexual violence becomes reconfigured as a narrative about men, privileging Ryan's responses rather than Marissa's. In female-fronted series, these narratives are framed differently, focusing on a female perspective on sexual violence. Further, perpetrators in these storylines are not always marginal figures. For example, Buffy is sexually harassed by two of her ex-lovers, both central male characters in the series. This indicates that the context in which these storylines take place affects how they are framed, as I shall discuss further in the following chapter.

Raised voices: Sexual violence as a catalyst for 'coming out'

The title of a two-part *Dawson's Creek* narrative, 214 'To be or not to be...' 215 'That is the question', illustrates the central concern of homophobic abuse narratives with issues of self-identity and 'coming out' rather than with romantic relationships.⁶⁷ Although there are hints that a character is homosexual before the abuse takes place, sexual violence operates as a catalyst for them to explicitly 'come out', either directly after the abuse or three to four episodes later. Unlike other storylines in the genre in which, like soap operas, the divulgence of secrets usually creates further storylines, the disclosure of homosexuality operates as a narrative end point, suggesting that 'coming out' was the problem for the homosexual character to overcome rather than widespread homophobia. In turn, it places the onus for change firmly on the victim.⁶⁸ Teen television scholars have tended to focus on these moments of disclosure rather than on the moments of sexual violence that precede them, reflecting wider television scholarship on homosexual representations (Dow, 2001; McCarthy, 2003; Davis, 2004). In this section, I want to develop upon this work by contextualising coming out narratives in relation to preceding homophobic abuse storylines. To do so, I will look at homophobic abuse narratives involving central gay character, Jack, in seasons two and five of *Dawson's Creek* and, more marginal bisexual teen, Anna in season two of *One Tree Hill*.

⁶⁷ Homosexual characters may be in heterosexual romantic relationships when this violence occurs, but the narrative emphasis remains on them coming out.

⁶⁸ Notably, homophobic abuse also operates as a catalyst for coming out in episodic narratives in *Beverly Hills* (426 'Blind Spot') and *Veronica Mars* (214 'Versatile Toppings') as well.

It is important to note that these narratives have precedents in episodic storylines across the genre. Both *Beverly Hills* (426 'Blind Spot') and *My So-Called Life* (115 'So-Called Angels') feature homophobic abuse episodes that aired in 1994. In these narratives, homophobic abuse is framed as a 'very special' issue. The *My So-Called Life* episode provides a useful example. The episode opens with queer teen, Rickie, coughing up blood in the snow. It is marked as 'very special' from the outset: it aired on the 22nd of December and the narrative takes place on Christmas Eve, featuring guest star, singer/songwriter Juliana Hatfield as an angel. Fantastical elements, with the exception of dreams, are rare in the series, limited only to one-off holiday specials such as the Halloween episode (109 'Halloween') which featured a teenage ghost. It doesn't, however, treat homosexuality as the 'issue', but rather links it to teenage homelessness and parental neglect more widely. Here, homophobic abuse does not operate as the catalyst for Rickie to come out, although he does so four episodes later in the series' finale (119 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities').

In contrast, the *Dawson's Creek* and *One Tree Hill* narratives aired in 1999 and 2004-5, respectively, and in keeping with the shift away from social issue episodes in the late 1990s discussed in the previous chapter, are much more self-conscious about their portrayal of homophobic abuse as an 'issue'. Despite this growing self-awareness, however, these narratives, also bare strong resemblances to social issue storylines. The dialogue is frequently didactic and the narratives focus on the different ideological perspectives of the ensemble cast and explore the aftermath of the abuse on the victim. Several television scholars have identified this tendency of programmes to treat homosexuality as an 'issue', arguing that queer representations and televisual seriality exist in opposition to one another, since programmes are resistant to portraying same-sex desire as everyday and uneventful (McCarthy, 2003; Allen, 1995). This leaves scholars to question if overt homosexuality can ever be depicted as anything other than an issue (Davis, 2004: 128-9).

In season two of *Dawson's Creek*, Jack's supposed heterosexuality is called into question when a callous teacher forces him to read a personal poem aloud in class, which hints at his same-sex desire. As a result, rumours quickly circulate around the school that Jack is gay. In *One Tree Hill*, there are also hints that Anna may be homosexual before the abuse takes place. In both programmes, the moment of abuse occurs similarly, taking the form of homophobic graffiti spray painted on a locker (Figures 6.6 and 6.7).



Figures 6.6 and 6.7 Institutional homophobia in *Dawson's Creek* (214 'To Be Or Not To Be...') and *One Tree Hill* (210 'Don't Take Me For Granted').

However, in *One Tree Hill*, it is not Anna that is the target, but her heterosexual friend, Peyton. It is later revealed that the perpetrator is Anna's homophobic brother, Felix, and that he targeted Peyton to deflect attention away from his sister. In this way, the narrative has two victims, as Anna is aware that the abuse is also partially directed at her. Unlike other sexual violence narratives which take place in deserted settings, the abuse occurs publicly in the densely populated school corridor. As indicated by figure 6.7, in *One Tree Hill* anonymous students walk past the front of cluttered frames, while Peyton and Brooke occupy the background. In both programmes, whispers permeate, while the victims – Jack, Peyton and Anna – are conspicuously silent.

In *Dawson's Creek* melancholy instrumental non-diegetic music begins when Andie, Jack's sister, spies his defaced locker. However, the viewer is aligned with Jack's

point of view and thus, it is not until he sees it that camera sharply pans 180 degrees to reveal a close up of the locker, accompanied by a sudden loud noise. The red spray painted letters of 'FAG' drip ominously, the blood-like colour further connoting threat. The different perspectives of the ensemble cast are emphasised in tight facial close ups along with those of anonymous students, although it is Jack's point of view that is privileged. Joey, Jack's girlfriend, appears worried and tearful, Pacey looks away in disgust and Andie tearfully tries to smile at Jack to show her support while random students are depicted in groups, whispering to each other. Jack's fear and embarrassment is palpable. Framed to the left of a medium close up, he looks down, swallows heavily, sniffs and glances around furtively. As he walks to his locker, a long shot reiterates the crowded nature of the space, with Jack pushed to the far right of the frame and others standing in front staring. To try to counter the allegations, Joey asks Jack to kiss her, but they are marginalised in another long shot as they do so, the words 'FAG' still prominent at the top centre of the frame. The scene ends by reemphasising heterosexual characters' reactions, as the camera cuts to close ups of anonymous students staring and then pans from Dawson to Pacey to Andie, who all look worried.

In these narratives, the closeted state is depicted as a space of danger, supported by the representation of marginal closeted characters as sexist bullies. In *Gossip Girl*, for example, gay character, Asher, maliciously forces Jenny to tell others that she lost her virginity to him in order to quell suspicions about his sexuality (116 'All About My Brother').⁶⁹ Coming out typically transforms these figures into sympathetic characters. In *Buffy* marginal male character, Larry, goes from verbally sexually harassing female students and grabbing Buffy's bottom to helping the victims of bullying after coming out to Xander (215 'Phases'). Indeed, central homosexual characters are predominantly represented positively (Davis, 2004: 134). As Geraghty remarks, albeit in relation to soap operas, these characters function didactically, to plead for tolerance and in turn, highlight the programme's liberal position (1995: 159). Notably, Geraghty made this observation in 1995 and thus, it is interesting that this tendency persists more than a decade later.

Repression itself, then, is a form of self-abuse, which can only be fought by coming out. Therefore, like the other sexual violence narratives discussed, the onus for change remains firmly on the victim rather than the perpetrator. Coming out is linked to liberation and presented as a highly subjective, individualised act. There is a tension between portraying homosexuality as something that has always been inherently inside these characters (Jack and Anna both refer to 'carrying it' around) and verbally 'coming out' as

⁶⁹ Additionally, in this episode it is revealed that central male teenager, Eric, tried to commit suicide (before the diegetic world of the series began) because he was gay and closeted.

the creator of truth (Davis, 2004: 132). Although there are hints that Jack is gay in *Dawson's Creek*, it is not until he utters the words that the viewer knows for sure.

In *Dawson's Creek* and *One Tree Hill* family members are often the most reluctant to accept their child or sibling's sexuality. These exchanges are highly emotional, typically characterised by angry, tearful dialogue, raised voices, hurt expressions, slamming doors and, ultimately, familial rejection. Melancholy non-diegetic music intensifies the tense, sombre atmosphere at key moments, but otherwise, the scenes are usually notably silent, making the gay character's tears and hiccups all the more audible. The *mise-en-scene* further underlines the teenager's emotions and the logic of the narrative. For example, Jack's disclosure to his father, a marginal character in *Dawson's Creek* who appears for the first time in this episode, illustrates these patterns. Taking place in the hallway of their large and formal house, a shot/reverse shot structure of tight close ups captures their heated exchange, the camera occasionally cutting to Andie who remains silent. The costuming, framing and movement within it emphasises the distance between Jack and his family members. Jack slumps on the bottom stair as he cries and apologises for being gay, while his father and Andie remain static, turned away from him (Figure 6.8). Yet, as Jack continues to cry, Andie joins him and the two are framed side by side. At this point the narrative shifts and Andie finally confronts their cold, neglectful father and tells him to leave.



Figure 6.8 Familial distance in the coming out narrative in *Dawson's Creek* (215 'That is the Question').

It is significant that Jack's and Anna's confessions (and coming out scenes more widely in teen series) never end on a wholly negative note, reiterating the genre's engagement with discourses of positive representation. Jack's father may leave, but Andie remains supportive and Anna later finds acceptance from her parents off-screen.⁷⁰ Furthermore, when homosexual characters come out to their heterosexual friends, these revelations, after initial surprise, are met with acceptance, understanding and kindness. Select sympathetic central adult characters react similarly, but the emphasis remains on exchanges between teenage friends. Again the emotionality and subjectivity of the revelation is highlighted by tight facial close ups and soft, gentle, non-diegetic music as the camera cuts between the two characters. The dialogue of the homosexual teenager is prioritised in lengthier shots as their friend listens supportively. Backgrounds are often plain, drawing attention to the characters' facial expressions. Coming out is characterised as a difficult experience, illustrated by the homosexual character's lengthy sigh, averted gaze, tearful expression, breaking voice and sharp inhales. Their speech is often peppered with 'ums' and 'ahs'. Unlike familial conversations, these disclosures take place in settings that connote warmth, safety and friendliness. In *My So-Called Life*, for example, Rickie comes out to his friend Delia at the kitchen table of his new home, having been taken in by gay teacher, Mr Katimski following his homelessness. Unlike Jack's cool, formal home, the earthy tones of exposed brickwork of the walls, warm lighting and personal artefacts strewn around the room connote intimacy and friendship. Similarly, in *One Tree Hill* Anna comes out to Lucas outdoors on a riverside basketball court – a space that connotes friendship and loyalty in the series – and is met with a smile and a hug.

Coming out operates as the narrative end point for both Rickie and Anna. In *My So-Called Life* Rickie's revelation occurs in the series' finale, while Anna leaves Tree Hill after she finds acceptance. *Dawson's Creek* differs in that Jack remains a central character after coming out in season two until the series' finale in season six. His integration into the day-to-day life of the series suggests that overt homosexuality can be portrayed as something other than a one-off issue and yet, notably, his storylines remain inextricably linked to his sexuality in a way that differs from those of his heterosexual friends. While he does have boyfriends, sharing his first same-sex kiss two seasons after coming out (420 'Promicide'), his most significant relationship is with Jen, whose baby he adopts in the series' finale when she dies. Indeed, in an earlier episode in season four, Jack and Jen share a kiss that occupies much more screen-time and is much more heated than any of his same-

⁷⁰ Jack's father also accepts his son's sexuality later in the series and tries to make amends for his previous treatment of him.

sex kisses (414 'A Winter's Tale'). In the same episode, he tells Jen that he is scared 'I'm never going to find a guy I love as much as I love you'.⁷¹

In college, Jack joins a fraternity and experiences further homophobia when his fraternity brothers beat him up (513 'Something Wilder'). Yet, although Jack is open about his sexuality at this point in the narrative, the homophobic abuse operates as a catalyst for him to 'come out' all over again, this time to a fraternity member, Eric, who asks what coming out was like (514 'Guerilla Filmmaking'). The scene follows many of the patterns of the aforementioned revelatory moments. Jack and Eric are framed side by side, lying back on the rug in his room, and overhead close up shots cut between the two as Jack describes the experience. Non-diegetic melancholy music intensifies the emotionality of the scene. However, in contrast to the other 'coming out' narratives discussed in this section, Jack's revelation to his friend is not met with acceptance. Eric later lies to the other members that Jack tried to kiss him, leading to Jack being ostracised from the fraternity. This is the end point for the storyline and Jack is marginalised in the following episodes. It is only a few episodes later that the viewer learns that he has moved back in with Jen and Grams. (It is interesting to note that Eric later comes out and is rendered sympathetic, reinforcing this notion of the genre's engagement with discourses of positive representation).

Thus, although Jack challenges the notion that homosexuality can only ever be represented as an 'issue' by remaining a central character, the above narrative highlights the limitations of representations of homosexuality in teen drama series and television more widely. The narrative pattern in *Dawson's Creek* and *One Tree Hill*, whereby coming out follows homophobic abuse storylines, suggests that these revelations are the solution to the problem of homophobia. This, in turn, obscures the seriousness of the abuse and problematically places the onus for change on the homosexual character. In the season two narrative in *Dawson's Creek*, for example, the perpetrator is never revealed, allowing the programme to sidestep this issue altogether. As Dow succinctly puts it, albeit in relation to another context, 'the secret being kept isn't homosexuality; it's homophobia and heterosexism' (2001: 104). Indeed, although over half of the US teen drama series that I analysed feature homosexual characters who are not simply relegated to one-off episodes, coyness still surrounds the visual representation of homosexual practices in a way that does not affect the depiction of heterosexual practices.

⁷¹ It is important to note that this is not always the choice of programmes makers (Kevin Williamson, the creator of *Dawson's Creek*, for example, is gay himself), but network pressure.

Conclusion

The over-arching sexual violence narratives discussed in this chapter highlight the tension between education and entertainment underpinning teen drama series, discussed in Chapter 2. On the one hand, many programmes have an agenda to educate young viewers on issues such as sexual violence. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, teen, feminist and television scholars more widely tend to favour the serial form over the episodic for dealing with issues in greater complexity. Indeed, these overarching narratives allow the issue of sexual violence to be explored in more detail. There is a greater emphasis on the aftermath on the victim, often focusing on their fear over a number of episodes. Further, perpetrators, while remaining non-recurring characters who are distinct from series' 'normal' males, are afforded slightly more of a back story with reasons offered (albeit flimsy ones) for their behaviour. In *Beverly Hills*, in particular, the programme's serial form allows for a sexual violence narrative to be revisited at a later date, establishing connections across different forms of abuse and highlighting the long-term effects of sexual violence on the victim.

On the other hand, programmes also need to entertain and appeal to the consumer. This is achieved through repetitive narrative codes and formal structures - e.g. cliff hangers, pacy editing and positioning these narratives at season finales - that are designed to engage the audience. Sexual violence narratives in *One Tree Hill*, *Friday Night Lights* and *Beverly Hills* all draw on the conventions of horror movies to heighten this dramatic tension, such as shaky, hand-held camerawork, shadowy lighting and ominous non-diegetic music. The perpetrators in these narratives are akin to horror movie monsters – incredibly violent, relentless in their pursuit and near indestructible.

It is notable that overarching sexual violence narratives rarely interrogate the relationship between this abuse and hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality. Instead, with the exception of homophobic abuse narratives, these storylines are embedded in teenage romantic relationships and, thus, sexual violence functions primarily as a plot device to advance or complicate these romances. The central concern of these narratives is how this abuse affects romantic teenage relationships. Indeed, although many of the storylines discussed in this chapter coincide with or stretch over season finales, the romance plot achieves greater narrative significance than the moment of sexual violence. It is break-ups or first kisses that coincide with season finales rather than attempted rapes.

Not only do teen scholars isolate the serial form as being better equipped to deal with sexual violence in complexity, but many also point to female-fronted series as

offering particularly conducive spaces for interrogating gender inequalities (Braithwaite, 2008; Bolte, 2008). These series potentially challenge the dominant understanding of sexual violence as a personal rather than a wider social issue, perpetrated by individual ‘bad’ men, privileged by other programmes. Indeed, in these series perpetrators of sexual violence are often central male characters. Moreover, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* feature overlapping episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives, thereby indicating the pervasiveness of gendered sexual inequalities and creating links between different types of sexual abuse. Chapter 7 will explore sexual violence in female-fronted series further.

Chapter 7

Heroine Television: Sexual Violence in Female-Fronted Teen Drama Series

Introduction

In Chapters 5 and 6, I argue that representations of sexual violence in teen drama series, while incorporating some feminist anti-rape discourses such as an emphasis on the emotional aftermath on the victim, predominantly work to reinforce the patriarchal status quo and rarely disrupt or problematise normative constructions of gendered sexuality. Sexual violence tends to be portrayed as the domain of non-recurring male characters who are marked as distinct from ‘normal’ males in these programmes. In turn, sexual violence often operates as a site for the performance of ideal masculinity as central male characters protect female victims. As such, these narratives frequently privilege male responses to sexual violence. This finding is not unique to sexual violence representations in teen drama series, but resonates more widely with the findings of Cuklanz (2000), Projansky (2001) and Moorti (2002) on rape representations across other fictional formats.

By contrast, in female-fronted teen series, the heroine’s point of view and, in turn, a female perspective on sexual violence is privileged. As such, several feminist television scholars argue that these programmes offer a more conducive space from which to expose and critique gender norms and inequalities (Bavidge, 2004; Braun, 2007; Bolte, 2008; Braithwaite, 2008). This argument is not new, nor does it specifically apply to female-fronted *teen* series. Writing in 1997, Brunsdon identifies an area of feminist television scholarship as textual studies of ‘heroine television’ (1997: 34). Using predominantly female-fronted sitcoms as examples – e.g. *Kate and Allie* (CBS, 1984- 9), *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986- 93) and *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985- 92) – she argues that ‘these shows are all, in some fundamental way, addressing feminism, or addressing the agenda that feminism has made public about the contradictory demands on women’ (34). Feminism is an unavoidable context for female-fronted programmes and it is this that I want to explore further in this chapter, looking at how this context intersects with representations of sexual violence.

My timeline research supports this view of female-fronted series as being different, revealing that these series differ significantly in how they position sexual violence in relation to series’ structures (see Appendix B). These differences occur across US and

British texts and, thus, in this chapter I will examine *Veronica Mars* and *Buffy* alongside *Hex*.⁷²

Hex and *Veronica Mars* both feature representations of physical sexual violence in their pilot episodes in the form of sexual assault and rape, respectively. In both series, the heroine is the victim and the perpetrator is a central male teenage character. The pilot of *Buffy* also features representations of sexualised violence when male and female vampires prey respectively on a central female and marginal male. In keeping with representations of sexual violence in supernatural series more widely, the sexual nature of this abuse is implicit, signaled by vampires, figures that traditionally connote sexual threat, and the dating context in which the violence takes place. In the pilot, in an analogy to date-rape, the vampires use sexual attraction to lure their unsuspecting victims to a deserted place before attacking them. As noted in Chapter 5, I have not included vampire attacks in my study of sexual violence, however, in this chapter I will look at this opening episode in more detail as it establishes an important context in which the rest of the series' representations of sexual violence take place. In all three programmes, representations of sexual violence or sexualised violence in these pilot episodes function similarly to highlight the series' engagement with feminist concerns from the outset. Notably, the pilot of another female-fronted series, *My So-Called Life*, also features sexual violence (as discussed in Chapter 5), but as the rest of the programme differs structurally from other series fronted by heterosexual heroines (arguably because it dates from an earlier time), I have chosen to omit it from this discussion.

While other teen drama series tend to depict episodic and overarching sexual violence storylines sequentially, in *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* these narratives often run concurrently. The first season of *Veronica Mars*, for example, features two concurrent over-arching sexual violence narratives which also often intersect with episodic sexual violence storylines. As we shall see, these overlaps can create thematic links between storylines, thus highlighting the pervasiveness of teenage sexual violence and establishing links between different forms of abuse. Alternatively, they can operate to further relationships between characters or function to implicate central, usually male, characters as perpetrators of multiple forms of sexual abuse. The most complicated narrative overlaps occur towards the end of seasons, leading up to climatic finales. *Hex*, arguably due to its shorter structure, has no overlapping storylines.

⁷² It is important to note that these differences are not just predicated on the gender of the protagonist, but on her sexuality also. In terms of representations of sexual violence, *Sugar Rush*, which features a lesbian central character, has more in common structurally with a male-fronted or ensemble cast series. I look at this in more detail in the following chapter.

Finally, each series also ends with a sexual violence narrative. *Buffy*, *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* all end with the resolution of an overarching sexual violence narrative in which the series' protagonist is fighting against male domination, with varying degrees of success. This pattern suggests that sexual violence remains a central concern throughout these programmes.

It is these structural differences that determine the structure of this chapter. I will begin by looking at representations of sexual violence in pilot episodes, before moving on to consider overlapping sexual violence storylines. I will then examine sexual violence narratives in finale episodes, before offering some conclusions.

Pilots

Pilot episodes serve a particular function in the broader context of teen drama series, at once establishing the series' similarity to and difference from other teen programmes. As Mittell explains, 'for a television series, a pilot is the primary site for establishing intrinsic norms for the ongoing series, and making clear connections to the relevant external norms of genre, narrative, mode, and style' (2009). The presence of sexual violence in the pilots of female-fronted series, then, suggests that an engagement with feminist concerns is an 'intrinsic norm' of these types of programmes. This section will explore this pattern in more depth, but firstly I want to outline other 'norms' of *Buffy*, *Hex* and *Veronica Mars*, as established in their pilot episodes, in order to then consider how these intersect with representations of sexual violence. As Chapter 4 illustrates, many of these norms are not unique to series with female protagonists, but this particular context affects how they are framed.

The recurring feminist critical argument that teen series with female protagonists offer a particularly conducive space for critiquing gendered norms and inequalities is inextricably linked to the centrality of a female narrative perspective (Braithwaite, 2008; Bolte, 2008). All three series establish this female perspective through the amount of screen-time and space that the heroines are afforded. *Veronica Mars* further reinforces a female point of view through Veronica's voice-over, which is more prominent in the pilot episode than at any other time. This voice-over blends teen and noir sensibilities. In keeping with the noir hybridity of the series, it is often highly cynical and serves an expository function, revealing clues to the viewer as Veronica investigates her cases and thus, helping to orient the viewer in relation to complex narrative arcs. Yet, emphasising the series' teen hybridity, the voice-over also often melodramatically dwells on romantic and familial relationships. Braithwaite explicitly connects the use of voice-over in

Veronica Mars with audience identification with a female point of view, arguing that, ‘intimate in tone, these confessional moments frame the audience’s entry into the conditions young women face as they navigate and interrogate their personal and professional relationships’ (2008: 140).⁷³

It is through her voice-over that Veronica directly critiques hegemonic constructions of gender and gendered romance. The opening line of the pilot, relayed through her voice-over, cynically declares ‘I’m never getting married’. This comment is reinforced by accompanying night-time images of a seedy motel in which couples meet to have affairs. While this romantic scepticism could be attributed to the series’ noir hybridity, it is notable that a similar, albeit less bitter, cynicism is found in the pilot of *Buffy*, conveyed through humorous dialogue. Discussing her inability to date, Willow explains, ‘I think guys prefer a girl that can talk’, to which Buffy incredulously replies, ‘you really haven’t been dating lately...’. Similar dialogue occurs between Cassie and her lesbian best friend, Thelma, in the pilot of *Hex*.

In feminist scholarship of these programmes, the ability of series to critique hegemonic gender norms and ideals of romance is not only linked to the centrality of a female perspective, but to an *exiled* female perspective. Bolte argues that the position of Buffy and Veronica on the margins of the diegetic in-crowd at their schools affords them a particularly credible and powerful space from which to expose and critique ‘the underpinnings of social, gender and class dynamics’ (2008: 99). Cassie in season one of *Hex* also exists on the margins: she is frequently ignored by her classmates and spends a lot of time on her own, wandering the school grounds. Her isolation is heightened by Thelma’s death at the end of the pilot.

Notably, almost all teenage protagonists, regardless of gender, occupy an initial outsider status within their high school and are often bullied. Yet, while male protagonists are bullied because of their lower class (Lucas in *One Tree Hill*, Ryan in *The O.C.*), female protagonists are harassed on the basis of their gender and sexuality. In the pilot of *Hex*, for example, Cassie and Thelma are routinely subject to verbal sexual abuse, from both male and female classmates, which teachers do little to prevent. The opening of *Buffy* also explicitly renders the high school a sexually threatening space. The pilot opens on a visibly nervous teenage female, dressed in school uniform, and a slightly older male breaking into the high school at night. Highlighting the series’ central subversion of gender expectations,

⁷³ *My So-Called Life* also prominently features a voice-over that operates to align the viewer with a teenage female point of view. Other than this, voice-overs are relatively uncommon in teen series, with the exceptions of *Gossip Girl* and *One Tree Hill*. Even in these two cases, the voice-over remains relatively detached, omnisciently narrating events or summing up a particular episode’s themes, often in the third person.

this opening plays on the conventions of female sexual vulnerability when the frightened female suddenly reveals herself to be a vampire and kills the previously cocky male.

The rest of the episode continues to play on the threat of sexual violence. For example, as Buffy walks alone down a dark street to The Bronze, the camera reveals a shadowy male figure following her. She continually glances over her shoulder, resonating with Kelly's (1988) findings, discussed in Chapter 2, that females experience a generalised fear of sexual violence. However, in keeping with the series' genre and gender inversions, Buffy turns the tables on her stalker and ambushes him.

Later in the episode, after taking Buffy's advice to 'seize the day', Willow leaves The Bronze with a male, who, unbeknownst to her, is a vampire. At this point, the threat of sexual violence is reconfigured as a narrative concerning Buffy's personal identity. Throughout the pilot episode, Buffy fights against her destiny as a vampire slayer, complaining to Giles that she wants to do normal, teenage things. Yet, upon seeing Willow in danger, she realises that she has no choice but to help. It is Buffy's perspective that the viewer is aligned with as she frantically searches for Willow. The camera then cuts to the man taking Willow on a 'shortcut' through a graveyard. Her increasing fear is captured in facial close ups and by her stammering dialogue. She shrieks as he pushes her roughly into a crypt. Shortly after, Darla, the female from the pilot's opening scene, joins them with Jesse, a marginal male teenager and they reveal themselves to be vampires. Suddenly Buffy enters and a climatic battle ensues. Sexualised violence, here, operates to emphasise to Buffy that she must embrace her destiny as slayer in order to protect the people she cares about.

Like the *Buffy* pilot, *Veronica Mars* also frames sexual violence as an issue concerning the heroine's personal identity. Through Veronica's flashbacks, the pilot establishes two overarching sexual violence narratives that will span the following two seasons. The first concerns Veronica's best friend's murder, which is later revealed to be sexually motivated, and the second involves Veronica's rape at a classmate's party. The viewer is aligned with Veronica's point of view as she walks through the party, with classmates looking at her scornfully. A shot of her taking a drink is accompanied by her voice-over informing the viewer that the drink was laced with a date-rape drug. From this point, the party's diegetic pop music is replaced by an ethereal, non-diegetic soundtrack. The viewer is aligned with Veronica's literally and figuratively fuzzy point of view as she wanders outside past a hot-tub full of students who stare and laugh at her. As she collapses on a sun-lounger, the scene fades to black.

The music links the previous scene with the next, which opens with a close up of Veronica opening her eyes and then an overhead shot as she gets out of bed. Sunlight

streams through the window behind her, indicating that it is the next morning. The camera cuts to a close up of a pair of white pants, discarded on the floor, indicating that Veronica has been raped. This is reinforced by a close up of Veronica's face registering a tear rolling down her cheek. Her cynical voice-over is conspicuously absent here, in keeping with the series' norms more widely in which her narration disappears at highly emotional moments. The close up fades into the next image as Veronica walks away from the house, her voice-over explaining that, 'I'm no longer that girl'.

The sexual violence narrative in the pilot of *Hex* similarly focuses on the heroine's self-identity. Echoing the episodic sexual-violence-as-a-warning-about-youthful-female-sexuality narratives discussed in Chapter 5, the series' heroine, Cassie, is sexually assaulted after she decides to go to a nightclub alone, dressed in a revealing, tight outfit. After being verbally harassed by her classmate, Leon, she escapes to a deserted, dimly lit corridor only for him to follow her. The camera cuts quickly between tight facial close-ups of the two, with more than a shot per second, as Cassie struggles against Leon's attempts to kiss her. A sudden extreme close-up of her eye, accompanied by a piercing scream, is followed by a close up of an overhead electrical box blowing up, sending sparks flying and plunging Cassie and Leon into darkness. The close succession of shots indicate that Cassie's telekinetic powers, which have been hinted at previously, are the cause of the explosion. This reading is reinforced by an extreme facial close up of Cassie looking incredulous at what she has done. The scene lasts just ten seconds before Cassie is able to escape and runs back to the boarding school where she lives.

In a series of shot/reverse shot close ups, Cassie tearfully recounts the evening's event to Thelma. Their dialogue is significant, reinforcing that in these pilots sexual violence is primarily framed as a personal issue for the protagonist.

CASSIE: Leon tried to...

THELMA: What?

CASSIE: I dunno, he tried to...

THELMA: What?

CASSIE: It's not that... I touch things.

She then proceeds to tell Thelma about her powers. As this extract demonstrates, Cassie's dialogue diverts attention away from Leon's actions to focus on her new-found powers. Thus, sexual violence is framed as an issue about Cassie's personal identity, specifically

her telekinesis, rather than a broader social problem relating to dominant constructions of gender and sexuality.

It is important to note that the liminal space between childhood and adulthood is figured as a dangerous stage in male-fronted series and is also signaled by violence in their pilot episodes. Yet, significantly it is not sexually threatening in nature. Instead, the violence takes place between the protagonist and another male character (typically a jock) and is often instigated by the protagonist's disgust over how the jock treats his girlfriend. Thus, it operates to define the male protagonist as virtuous, only using violence in the service of protecting others and, in doing so, highlighting his sensitivity towards female characters (Ryan in *The O.C.*, Lucas in *One Tree Hill*, Clark in *Smallville*), in contrast to aggressive, selfish and sexist jocks, who use violence to assert their power (Luke in *The O.C.*, Nathan in *One Tree Hill*, Whitney in *Smallville*). Notably, these protagonists are the same males who later protect and defend female victims from sexually violent men. These scenes are aesthetically different to scenes of sexual violence in the pilots of female-fronted series. Instead of connoting danger and threat, the scenes emphasise excitement, adrenaline and even glamour. Although the violence, as in *Buffy* and *Hex*, takes place outdoors at night and is marked by fast-paced editing and alternating long-shots and close ups, it is accompanied by fast, upbeat pop music and followed immediately by scenes that emphasise humour. Indicating this lack of danger, following a fight involving Ryan in the pilot of *The O.C.*, Seth jokily remarks, 'it was like *Fight Club* or something'.

This comparison indicates that feminism and feminist concerns such as sexual violence are an unavoidable context for female-fronted series. Although, in these pilots, sexual violence is inextricably linked to the heroine's personal identity, the specific context - a context that repeatedly stresses a cynicism surrounding gender norms and hegemonic romantic ideals and emphasises gendered bullying - affects how these sexual violence representations are framed, potentially challenging an understanding of this abuse as a isolated problem of an otherwise functioning patriarchy. Notably, the positioning of sexual violence storylines in the pilot episode is not unique to drama series with *teenage* heroines, but occurs also in programmes that are fronted by female young adults. The pilots of *Dollhouse* (Fox, 2009- 2010), *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-), *Alias* (ABC, 2001- 2006), *Ghost Whisperer* (CBS, 2001- 2005) and *Tru Calling* (Fox, 2003- 2005) all also feature sexual violence.

Importantly (and obviously), these pilots do not exist in vacuums but play a crucial role in establishing the premise of the series. Indeed, as I shall go on to discuss, the broader context of *Buffy*, *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* further undermines a purely individualised understanding of this abuse. Sexual violence pervades these series throughout. The

following section develops this argument further, focusing on the narrative and ideological functions of overlapping sexual violence narratives. Since *Hex* does not feature any overlapping sexual violence storylines, in this section I will focus on *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*.

Narrative Complexity and Sexual Violence

A feature of representations of sexual violence in these two female-fronted series is that, unlike male-fronted or ensemble cast series that typically focus on one sexual violence storyline at a time, these programmes often feature two or more of these narratives concurrently. Typically, these involve an episodic narrative intersecting with an overarching storyline. These overlaps potentially (although not necessarily) challenge individualised understandings of sexual violence, by creating thematic links between different types of violence and highlighting the pervasiveness of this abuse in teenage characters' lives. Moreover, in these series central male characters (typically the heroine's or her female friend's lover) are positioned as perpetrators, making it difficult to see sexual violence as a one-off occurrence perpetrated by an individual bad man. This promotes an understanding of sexual violence that is rooted in normative constructions of gendered sexuality that promote male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. However, these overlaps occur in multiple different ways with different narrative and ideological results. This section is concerned with exploring this aspect of *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* further, considering how this complex narrative structure relates to the underlying ideology of these storylines. To do so, I will draw on the various different kinds of narrative complexity outlined by Mittell (2006) in relation to contemporary US television programmes. Mittell explicitly cites *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* as examples of narratively complex series, linking their complexity to their series' structure and, more specifically, their foregrounding of ongoing storylines (2006: 32). He explains that unlike the complex narration of soap operas that prioritise character and relationships over plot, narratively complex series use plot devices to advance character and relationship development (2006: 33).

One example of narrative complexity in female-fronted series is the interruption of an overarching sexual violence storyline with a self-contained episodic sexual violence narrative. In these cases, the demands of the longer story arc are largely set aside and an episodic narrative takes precedence. Notably, this pattern does not just apply to representations of sexual violence in female-fronted teen series. Mittell uses an episode of *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993- 2002) to illustrate. *Veronica Mars* episode 'The Girl Next Door'

(107) provides a useful example here. In this episode, Veronica investigates suspected dating violence after her neighbour, Sarah – a non-recurring, pregnant teenager – disappears. Emphasising the series' noir hybridity, the episode takes place in reverse, opening with an anonymous man being taken away from Veronica's apartment complex in an ambulance, before flashing back in time to outline Veronica's investigation as she tries to locate Sarah and find out what happened to her. The storyline is resolved when Veronica finds Sarah's missing diary and through reading it, learns her location and, further, that she ran away because she was raped. The anonymous man at the episode's start is revealed as the rapist and Sarah's step-father who is also the father of her unborn child.

As Mittell observes, it is not unusual for television dramas to 'oscillate between long-term arc storytelling and stand-alone episodes', explaining that this interplay between the demands of episodic and serial storytelling is one of the hallmarks of narrative complexity (2006: 33). Yet, unlike the episodic examples used by Mittell which indicate a complete departure from the demands of longer story arcs, this episode rewards viewers' prior knowledge of Veronica's rape. Although the episodic mystery element is coherent in its own right, an awareness of this rape alters how certain events are interpreted and helps viewers solve clues along with Veronica. For example, when Sarah's co-worker casually tells Veronica that Sarah was raped, the camera instantly pulls in on a close up of Veronica's alarmed reaction. Although no explanation is provided, the knowledge of Veronica's rape promotes an understanding of her subsequent investment in the case and, further, helps to explain how she instantly knows that this co-worker stole the diary. Her own experience, having confided in no-one aside from the callous town Sheriff, helps her (and viewers) understand that it is unlikely Sarah would have confided in such a casual acquaintance.

It is important to note that these overlaps between episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives do not always operate to establish thematic connections that highlight the pervasiveness of gendered abuse or to promote a shared identity between the victims. Although connections are implicitly made between Veronica's and Sarah's experiences, Veronica does not confide her own experience of rape to Sarah and the two females are never depicted together on-screen again. Sarah does not reappear in the series. Ultimately, the privileged thematic parallels in this episode concern issues of paternity not sexual violence. Just as Sarah's boyfriend is about to raise a child that is not biologically his, in this episode Veronica discovers that her father may not be her real dad (an event that has repercussions for the investigation of her rape in later episodes). The final line, conveyed through Veronica's voice over, questions, 'are some things better left buried?'. It seems unlikely that this comment relates to Sarah's experiences, which the narrative stresses has

caused her severe psychological trauma, but rather relates more to Veronica's own investigation of her paternity.

In the above example, the overlaps between the episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives are limited but, in some cases, these overlaps establish and privilege direct links. As Mittell argues, 'In conventional television narratives that feature A and B plots the two stories may offer thematic parallels or provide counterpoint to one another, but they rarely interact at the level of action' (2006: 34). In contrast, in narratively complex television series two (or more) storylines directly intersect. An episodic sexual violence narrative from the second season of *Buffy* (219 'I Only Have Eyes For You') exemplifies this tendency. The episode features Buffy and her friends investigating James, a teenage male poltergeist from 1955 who is trapped in the school and forced to endlessly replay the night in which he shot his older lover in a jealous rage. Throughout the episode, different contemporary teenagers and adults are possessed by James' and his lover's spirits. James' sexual possessiveness over his lover is one element of sexual violence, but the storyline is complicated further by the fact that his lover was also his teacher. Moreover, the episode occurs midway through an overarching sexual violence narrative involving Buffy's vampire boyfriend, Angel, losing his soul after he and Buffy have sex for the first time. This leads him to embark on a murderous and sexually violent rampage, in which he kills a prostitute, snaps the neck of a sympathetic, recurring character, Jenny Calendar, stalks Buffy and her friends and generally creates a climate of intense (sexual) fear. As Angel's abusive behaviour *follows* the end of his relationship with Buffy, this provides an example of an overarching narrative in which sexual violence functions as a warning about the dangers of choosing the wrong man (see Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion). In turn, the narrative overlaps in this episode create links between both Angel and James' quest for control over their ex-lovers.

These parallels are marked through the editing, the dialogue and the characters' reactions to the mystery case. The opening stresses Buffy's emotional response to Angel's behaviour; she turns down an offer of a date and complains to Willow who replies optimistically that 'love can be nice'. Directly undermining this comment, the camera suddenly cuts to a long shot of the dimly lit school corridor, where a teenage couple are having a heated argument. In keeping with *Buffy*'s pre-credit sequences more generally, explicit danger is established through a non-diegetic pulsing drum beat, melancholy strings, shadowy lighting and the use of a handheld camera which circles around the couple, creating an unsettling disorientation in the viewer. The music rises in pitch and volume as the male reveals a gun. The camera then alternates between close ups of the gun, held in the male's visibly shaking hand, and the female's shocked reaction as he ominously

states, 'love is forever'. A sudden drum beat and fade to black signal the start of the credits. Immediately afterwards, Buffy intervenes, knocking the boy to the floor and exclaiming, 'You just went O.J. on your girlfriend!'. Her reference to the 1994 case in which O.J. Simpson was arrested on suspicion of killing his ex-wife creates further extra-textual parallels between forms of male sexual control over their ex-lovers.

These connections are reinforced by Buffy's uncharacteristically serious and angry response to James. While her friends are attacked in indirect ways by the poltergeist, it is solely Buffy who experiences flashbacks to 1955, witnessing James' and his teacher's relationship first-hand. Her reaction is very much tied to her own experience of violence at the hands of Angel. Arguing with Giles over forgiveness, she maintains,

James destroyed the one person he loved most in a moment of blind passion and that's not something you forgive, no matter why he did what he did, no matter if he knows now that it was wrong and selfish and stupid. It's just something he's going to have to live with.

Slow, melancholy piano music underscores the emotion of her response which is heightened by close ups of each of her friends looking concerned about her unusually closed-minded reaction. In keeping with *Buffy*'s punctuation of serious narratives with self-aware comic moments, the typically tactless Cordelia exclaims, 'okay...over-identify much?!'

In the episode's climatic finale, the connections between the two storylines become explicit as Buffy and Angel are possessed by James' and his lover's spirits and forced to assume the roles of the troubled lovers. Having over-identified throughout with the female victim, Buffy assumes the role of James, the killer who has been jilted, while Angel assumes the female role. The editing reinforces the narrative parallels, cutting between shots of Buffy and Angel and James and his lover. The narrative is resolved when James is able to find understanding and forgiveness through Buffy and, simultaneously, Buffy is able to say goodbye to Angel with a lengthy thirty-second kiss before he returns to his soulless self. Thus, while the episode offers closure to a 'mystery-of-the-week', it also uses this plot to further the Buffy/Angel story arc which will culminate three episodes later in the season finale.

Indeed, in *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*, plotlines in episodic sexual violence narratives are frequently used to generate emotional responses to characters and further relationship developments in overlapping overarching sexual violence storylines, in turn enhancing their emotional affectivity. For example, the gender inversion towards the end of this narrative with Buffy assuming James' role and Angel assuming the female teacher's role, is crucial to the emotional impact of the storyline, providing viewers with a brief glimpse

of the soul-ful Angel from earlier episodes. Like the *Veronica Mars* example, while this episode is coherent on its own, its emotional resonance derives from viewers' knowledge of and investment in a previous narrative, namely Buffy and Angel's previous romantic relationship, creating a dense layer of narrative history.

Both *Veronica Mars* and *Buffy* feature gender and genre inversions with their heroines assuming the traditionally active masculine roles of noir-like private investigator and superhero respectively. These gender inversions extend to their romantic relationships. In season one of *Veronica Mars* when Logan and Veronica begin dating he transforms from, in Veronica's words, 'a psychotic jack-ass' who displays highly violent behaviour and frequently verbally sexually harasses Veronica, to a gentle, kind and sensitive lover.⁷⁴ He often occupies a feminine role in their relationship: he meets with Veronica in the girls' toilets, she frequently helps him out of (non-physical) trouble and in the first episode of season three, she carries his books to class.

Similarly, as McCracken rightly observes, the second season sexual violence story arc in *Buffy* revolves around Angel and Buffy's romantic relationship which 'is predicated on the naturalization of their reversed gender positioning' (2007: 120). As she explains, in *Buffy* Angel assumes two traditionally feminine roles, 'the spectacularized erotic body and the traumatized body' (2007: 120). He is often displayed as an erotic object to be looked at both diegetically, by female characters in the series, and non-diegetically, by viewers. Moreover - until he loses his soul at least - he occupies a supporting, passive role in relation to Buffy. The poignancy of the second season narrative, then, is generated by Angel's and Buffy's assumption of normative gender roles: Angel assumes narrative agency, sexually harassing Buffy and her friends, while throughout the story arc Buffy is frequently depicted crying on her bed, in a more passive role.

Buffy and *Veronica Mars* differ from other teen series in that it is not unusual for perpetrators of sexual violence to be central male characters. Buffy is not only sexually harassed by Angel when he loses his soul in season two, but her second vampire lover, Spike, attempts to rape her in season six (619 'Seeing Red'). Notably, neither Angel nor Spike is human, but as Boyle notes, '*Buffy* continually draws parallels between its monsters and its men, making masculinity both visible and problematic' (2005b: 41). As she explains, when Angel loses his soul, he has more in common with his pre-vampiric self. Further, in another context, Boyle points out that when Spike attempts to rape Buffy 'he is clearly marked as man rather than monster' (2005a: 189). Season six of *Buffy* also features an overarching sexual violence storyline in which a human male, Warren, is the

⁷⁴ This character transformation in the name of love occurs more widely across fictional television formats, as discussed in Chapter 4.

perpetrator. In this narrative, Warren puts his ex-girlfriend under a magic spell and instructs her to perform fellatio on him. As she is about to do so, the spell wears off and she angrily confronts him, which results in Warren killing her to stop her from leaving (613 'Dead Things'). This narrative is all the more shocking as up until this point in the series, Warren and his cronies, Andrew and Jonathan, have largely been cast as comic villains, not to be taken seriously.

Veronica Mars also implicates central males in its sexual violence narratives as the final three episodes of season one indicate. In 'M.A.D.' (120), Veronica works on behalf of her classmate, Carmen, to stop her boyfriend, Tad, from blackmailing her with a sexually explicit video he made of her while they were in a hot-tub. It is later revealed that Tad drugged Carmen in order to make the video and, further, that the filming took place at the same party where Veronica was raped. Veronica's awareness of the temporal and spatial connections between these two events induces a flashback to the night of her rape. In keeping with all flashbacks in the series, this scene is characterised by hazy, blue lighting, muted colours and soft-focus camerawork, but the ethereal non-diegetic music of the pilot's flashback is replaced by threatening thundering timpani and a pulsing drumbeat reminiscent of a heart beat, establishing a more ominous atmosphere. The viewer is aligned with Veronica's literally and figuratively fuzzy point of view as she passes Carmen and Tad in the hot-tub before collapsing on a sun lounger. The camera cuts back to a close up of her alarmed reaction in the present, as her voice-over ponders, 'Could it be that the night Carmen gave her boyfriend a sex show in the hot-tub that she can't remember was the same night I was drugged and raped in a guest bedroom?'

The temporal and spatial connections between the two narratives create links between different forms of male sexual abuse over women and, further, establish connections between the victims. In doing so, the series promotes an understanding of sexual violence as a wider social problem. At the same time, however, the series' noir hybridity, which privileges a lone, isolated detective, ultimately prevents a shared identity between Carmen and Veronica based on the prevalence of this gendered sexual abuse. Veronica does not tell Carmen about her rape, nor does she tell anyone else until the following episode. Additionally, the revenge that she exacts on Tad is intensely personal. There is no sense that he has learnt a lesson, referring to Veronica as a bitch and smirking over his public circulation of his video of Carmen in his final scene.

Yet, towards the end of the episode, another layer is added to the intersecting narratives when Tad reveals that it was Logan, Veronica's boyfriend, who supplied the date-rape drugs that he gave to Carmen. The weight of this revelation is predicated on viewers' memory of Logan's highly violent and sexist behaviour towards Veronica in

earlier episodes, behaviour which makes it believable that he could be capable of rape. Indeed, in the paranoiac noir context of the series, nobody can be fully trusted, as the following episode, in which Veronica investigates her rape, makes clear (121 'A Trip to the Dentist'). As she has no memory of the event, she is forced to rely on the testimonies of her peers, many of which prove unreliable and contradictory. At the end of the episode she 'solves' the rape case when she is told that her memory of rape is false and that she actually had consensual sex with her equally drugged ex-boyfriend, Duncan. However, the case resurfaces at the finale of season two when Veronica discovers that she was raped after all by her classmate, Cassidy (one of the males she interviewed over her rape in season one). Cassidy also rapes his girlfriend, Mac, in this episode (off-screen).

While Cassidy is a recurring character, it is important to note that he is more marginal than other central males. Further, in the season two finale he is recast as a crazed villain, limiting the connections that could be made between normative constructions of masculinity and violence. Another layer is added to the narrative here when it is suggested that Cassidy's actions were motivated by his own experiences of being sexually abused as a child, by his male Little League coach. In this way, *Veronica Mars* engages with the 'cycle of abuse' theory, which has been a popular way of explaining (and excusing) male violence (Boyle, 2005a: 99).⁷⁵ As Kelly (1996) notes, this idea is problematic as many abused children do not go on to abuse and, further, females are overwhelmingly victims yet males are overwhelmingly perpetrators. She explains that, 'Every cycle model attempts to reduce complex social realities, which have more than a little to do with structural power relations, to simplistic behavioural and individualistic models' (1996: 47). In *Veronica Mars* it makes little sense that because Cassidy was abused by an adult male, he then goes on to rape teenage females. The suggestion that Cassidy raped Veronica and Mac because he too was once raped partially excuses his behaviour as well as obscures the relationship between dominant constructions of masculinity and violence. It is notable here that Logan is also let off the hook in the season two finale for his previous behaviour towards Veronica. In this episode, he is recast as her saviour, rescuing her from a rooftop showdown with Cassidy. In the process, ideals of masculinity are recuperated.

The ability of one sexual violence storyline to alter how another, previous storyline is interpreted exemplifies another element of narrative complexity across these series which relates to their multi-season structure. In relation to sexual violence narratives in season one of *Veronica Mars*, Braithwaite argues that,

⁷⁵ The 'cycle of abuse' has a wider currency throughout the series. It is hinted at that Sheriff Lamb was abused as a child, hence his callous behaviour, and further, it is implied that Logan's aggressive behaviour is a result of his physical abuse at the hands of his father.

By adapting the private investigator's characteristic authority and agency, and by transforming teen female life into a serial crime story, *Veronica Mars* challenges popular postfeminism's easy dismissal of feminism's relevance. The program's trope of investigation scrutinizes claims of individual freedom and choice by making public the multiple ways in which young women are constructed, conditioned, and exploited on the basis of their gender and sexuality (2008: 146).

Yet, complicating this argument, in season three, the series overtly distances itself from feminist discourses on male sexual violence against women.

Unusually for *Veronica Mars*, by season three, Veronica has a close female friend in Mac and has begun socialising with Mac's female roommate, Parker. At the end of the first episode of the season, Parker is drugged and raped and has her head shaved. This is the hallmark of a serial rapist that Veronica investigated on a college open-day in a self-contained episode from season two (216 'The Rapes of Graff'). Veronica was unwittingly in the room at the time of the rape, but due to the dim lighting and Parker's promiscuous lifestyle, she mistook the attack for consensual sex. The following episode (302 'My Big Fat Greek Rush Week') opens with a shot of Parker talking to a female police officer in her dorm room, accompanied by slow, melancholy non-diegetic music. The camera pulls closer on her as she speaks, while Veronica's voice over cuts in, explaining that, 'the thing about being roofied and raped...you may not remember the who, when, where and why, but you know the what'. Halfway through this voice-over, the camera cuts to a longshot, from across the room, of Mac and Veronica at the very left of the frame looking on at Parker (Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1 A shared gendered identity between Veronica, Mac and Parker in *Veronica Mars* (302 'My Big Fat Greek Rush Week').

The layering of images of these three women with Veronica's oral recounting of her own rape establishes a shared gendered identity between them based on their experiences of rape. Slowly the camera pans right to focus on Veronica and Mac, framed side by side, before cutting to shot/reverse shot close ups of the two as they express their guilt over not stopping the sexual attack. By the end of the scene, however, Parker and Veronica are pitted against each other when Veronica reveals that she was in the room at the time of the rape and did nothing.

Parker's rape marks the beginning of nine-episode story arc detailing Veronica's investigation into the serial rapist. Throughout the case, she is pitted against a group of feminists, Lilith House, who are campaigning to have the university's fraternity houses abolished, drawing on anti-rape discourses that stress that exclusively male environments foster sexual violence against women.⁷⁶ The oppositions between Veronica and this group are illustrated in the table below:

<u>Feminist Lilith House</u>	<u>Veronica Mars</u>
Humourless	Witty
Group	Individual
Lies	Truth
Angry	Calm
Physical aggression	Verbal aggression
Second-wave	Post-feminist
Marginal	Central

Table 7.1 Oppositions between Veronica Mars and Feminist Lilith House in season 3 of *Veronica Mars*

The oppositions established between Veronica and Lilith House are strikingly similar to those invoked by third-wave and post-feminist scholars in relation to second-wave scholars, discussed in Chapter 2. Here, the feminist group is portrayed as mean, unsmiling and humourless, angrily berating Veronica when her quest to find the rapist interferes with their campaign. It is later revealed that they faked one of the rapes to further their cause, leading Veronica to admonish, 'nothing hurts the cause more than that'. As Fiske explains, 'The cultural specificity or ideology of a narrative lies in the way this deep structure is transformed into apparently different stories, that is, in which actions and individuals are chosen to perform the functions and character roles' (1987: 138). In this

⁷⁶ As noted in Chapter 4, fraternities, in teen dramas, and fictional formats more widely, are typically portrayed as sexually abusive spaces.

case, the feminist group are portrayed as the villains and a force of disorder, lying to selfishly obtain their own means, in contrast to Veronica as the heroine and a force of order, seeking the truth. Throughout this overarching storyline, there is a tension between Veronica's experience of sexual violence and other forms of gendered inequality as a woman, and her relentless desire for truth and justice as an isolated (masculine) private eye. Her voice-over in the following episode reinforces this tension. Watching the feminist group celebrate over their success at getting the fraternities shut down, she ponders, 'if the Lilith House's mission was to protect women on campus, I'm not sure this display is doing the trick...there's still a rapist at large'.

Ultimately the series privileges an individualised understanding of sexual violence when Veronica identifies the true rapist as Mercer, a friend of Logan and a non-fraternity member. Although Mercer is depicted sympathetically in earlier episodes as popular, intelligent and handsome, in the final episode of the story arc, he transforms into a kind of 'Scooby Doo' evil villain, delivering a crazy anti-female monologue before trying to rape his next victim. As such, connections between normative constructions of masculinity and sexual violence are obscured and, like the narratives discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, sexual violence becomes the domain of an individual 'bad' man.

In conclusion, in *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* overlapping episodic and overarching sexual violence narratives highlight the pervasiveness of this abuse. These overlaps potentially (although not necessarily) enable links to be made between different forms of abuse and between victims, highlighting the routine nature of male sexual violence against women. Further, the casting of central males as perpetrators of sexual violence in these programmes problematises the understanding of sexual violence as the domain of an individual 'bad' man, privileged in male-fronted and ensemble cast series. Many overarching sexual violence narratives in these series *follow* the end of romantic relationships, thereby also complicating hegemonic ideals of romance.

However, it is important to note that these narrative overlaps have different outcomes depending on the individual storyline and programme. The noir hybridity of *Veronica Mars* intersects powerfully with its sexual violence narratives. While the series' overlapping sexual violence storylines potentially create links across different forms of abuse and between victims, these connections are consistently undermined by Veronica's position as an isolated private-eye. As such, a shared identity between female victims in this programme is frequently denied. This tension is particularly prevalent in season three when Veronica is pitted against a group of humourless feminists. The series also has a tendency to portray perpetrators of sexual violence as pantomime villains, closing down possible connections between normative constructions of gendered sexuality and violence.

In this way, although the programme regularly brings feminist concerns to the fore, its ideological stance on these issues is inconsistent.

Although *Buffy* is also an isolated heroine, like *Veronica*, the programme emphasises her friendships and she often works as a team to solve mysteries and defeat demons. As such, the series privileges connections between *Buffy* and other victims of sexual violence. Moreover, in two overarching storylines, it is *Buffy*'s lovers who are cast as perpetrators of sexual violence, explicitly rendering normative constructions of masculinity problematic. At the same time, though, like *Veronica Mars*, *Buffy* can also be inconsistent in its ideological stance. Nevertheless, what both these series do is regularly bring feminist concerns to the fore and highlight connections between normative constructions of gender and sexuality and sexual violence, even if their ideological stance on this abuse is not always didactically consistent.

Finales: Resolutions?

Buffy, *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* not only start with representations of sexual violence in their pilot episodes, but end with the resolution of overarching sexual violence narratives also. This section will explore this structural pattern further.

By the end of season three of *Veronica Mars*, a sense of equilibrium has been restored and *Veronica* is much happier and less preoccupied. The original cause of her transformation from carefree teenager to isolated private investigator has been resolved with the death of Lilly's killer and her discovery of who raped her. Although she continues to solve mysteries on behalf of her university peers, she is much less cynical and isolated. She has close male and female friends and is in a romantic relationship with her friend, Piz, which is much less volatile than her previous romances. Furthermore, having given up on reuniting her parents, her family life is stable and she is comfortably middle-class again, after her father resumes his previous role as town sheriff.

Echoing the pilot episode, it is a sexual violence narrative that disrupts this state of harmony when *Veronica* discovers in the series' penultimate episode that a sexually explicit video of her and Piz has been leaked on the Internet. This leads to her being verbally sexually harassed by male classmates across campus. The sexual violence narrative operates to transform her back into her cynical, isolated and preoccupied self. (Indeed, the title of the episode, 'The Bitch Is Back', highlights this return to her former self.) There is a hint that her relationship with Piz is threatened as a result, when he catches her looking lovingly at Logan as he violently defends her honour. Familiar characters from season one return when *Veronica* discovers that The Castle, a secret society comprising of

powerful men from Hearst University, are responsible for filming her and that Jake Kane, Lilly's father, is one of its members. As revenge, she breaks into the Kane mansion and steals his hard-drive, leaking all the members' names to a journalist. At the same time, her actions jeopardize her father's chances of re-election when he is forced to destroy evidence of the break-in to protect her.

As is characteristic of the series as a whole, the narrative is reframed as a mystery-to-be-solved, rather than a storyline about sexual violence. Further it is reconfigured as a noir-like narrative about Veronica's personal vendetta against Jake and her decision not to confide in her father. This decision is connected to her selfish, youthful fallibility, in contrast to her father's parental sacrifice, reinforced by editing that cuts between Veronica gleefully decoding the hard-drive to take revenge on Jake and her father desperately trying to get in touch with her.

Veronica Mars ends on a downbeat, pessimistic note, as the following morning Veronica learns of the repercussions of her actions in a local newspaper story about her father destroying evidence. As she reads, the opening non-diegetic bars of Albert Hammond's 'Seems It Never Rains in Southern California' can be heard softly in the background. The camera pulls in closer to reveal her angry, shocked reaction as she scrunches up the paper in her fist and blinks away tears. In the following scene, the non-diegetic music rises in volume as Veronica votes for her father in the election. The song's ironic chorus, which echoes its title, kicks in as Veronica leaves the polling station to the sounds of rolling thunder. A final long shot stresses her isolation as she walks away down a grey street in the rain (Figure 7.2).



Figure 7.2 Final scene of *Veronica Mars* (320 'Weevils Wobble but they Don't Go Down').

Complicating the implicit feminist critical argument that either underlying patriarchal or feminist ideologies govern the narratives of female-fronted television texts, this downbeat ending can be interpreted in polysemic ways. On the one hand, the emphasis

on sexual violence as a personal issue about Veronica supports a post-feminist reading of the series that reframes political issues as personal choices and, in doing so, suggests that feminist activism is no longer relevant. On the other hand, the pessimistic closure could be read as a critique on these post-feminist discourses, stressing that an individual alone cannot stop the pervasiveness of male sexual domination. Yet this reading is complicated by previous events in the series, such as the distancing of Veronica from a feminist collective earlier in the same season. There are further generic and extra-textual factors to consider too. At this point, the series faced an uncertain future. A fourth season, which would take place a few years in the future with Veronica working at the F.B.I., was proposed and, thus, the noir elements, which work against a fully resolved happy ending, needed to be maintained. The pessimistic ending could also be seen to reflect this uncertainty of the series' future.

Hex ends on a similarly downbeat note when again the individual heroine is rendered ineffectual from stopping male domination and, thus, saving the world. Because of its shorter structure, the series follows the same sexual violence storyline throughout as the heroines, Cassie in season one and Ella in season two, try to prevent the Satanic figure of Azazeal, his teenage son, Malachi, and their army of fallen angels from destroying the world. The violence that Azazeal, Malachi and the other fallen angels inflict upon others is sexual in nature: Azazeal possesses Cassie before having sex with her, thereby rendering the sex non-consensual. In doing so, he impregnates her with his demon spawn and she gives birth to Malachi at the end of season one. Malachi ages at an extraordinary rate to become a seventeen year old teenager in season two, who proceeds to enslave students by seducing and having sex with them. In this season, Cassie dies and is replaced by Ella, a witch who is hundreds of years old but looks like a teen.

The sexual specificity of Malachi's violent actions are largely obscured in the finale, which becomes instead about love, specifically Ella's love for her boyfriend, Leon, the male who sexually assaulted Cassie in the series' pilot. Ultimately, this is a narrative that, like the finale of *Veronica Mars*, emphasises the heroine's personal choice as Ella chooses her love for Leon over her destiny. The heteronormative romantic subplot obscures the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. Indeed, at its close, the series reconfigures Leon as a hero, who ultimately saves Ella by carrying her from the burning school after Malachi succeeds in causing the apocalypse. The following scene, which takes place the next morning, connotes pastoral peacefulness, depicting Ella and Leon in a wild forest with sun streaming through the trees and birds singing. Yet, despite this idyllic setting, a sense of stable equilibrium is denied by the promise of the end of the world. In the final shot of the series, the camera sweeps from right to left to reveal a close

up of a rock with the fallen angels' symbol carved into the stone and blood dripping from it, accompanied by ominous, pulsing, non-diegetic music. This ending, like the finale of *Veronica Mars*, leaves the possibility of another season open.

Buffy differs from *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* in the heroine's relationship to the social at the series' close. The overarching sexual violence narrative in season seven spans five episodes and details Buffy and her friends' fight against the non-corporeal First Evil, an abstract entity that can manifest itself in the form of any dead person. The vessel for the First's power takes the form of superhuman Caleb, a highly misogynistic and patronising Southern adult male priest. His physical violence against Buffy and the group of teenage female potential vampire slayers that she establishes can be read as sexualised through his highly misogynistic and sexist verbal abuse as he physically torments them. He constantly taunts them for their gender and sexuality, regularly calling them 'whores' and 'bitches'. In the pre-credit sequence of the finale, Buffy finally kills him and it is his later haunting of her, mocking her gender and isolation as the one true slayer, that is the catalyst for her forming a plan to defeat the First.

The relationship between the individual and the social is crucial to this plan, which is only revealed to viewers as it happens. Buffy and her group of potential slayers stand on the brink of attacking the First's vast demon army. Their solidarity is stressed by the camerawork; individuals, including Buffy, are never framed alone, instead framed in sweeping long-shots. As Willow embarks on a spell, the plan becomes clear. The narrative flashes back to Buffy's speech to the potential slayers, in which she challenges the patriarchal rules that outline that there is only one true slayer, exclaiming, 'I say my power should be our power'. Willow's spell will distribute Buffy's power evenly across the potentials. The visuals reinforce the speech as the camera cuts between images of girls of different races, ethnicities and ages - from a young, white adolescent nervously taking the plate at a baseball game, to a black teenager leaning against a locker, a white teen picking her head up off her bedroom floor, a Japanese girl rising from her family dining table and an over-weight teen stopping an ominous male fist and looking him directly in the eye. As Buffy's voice-over reiterates that all of these girls will become slayers, the camera returns to the first girl as she looks up from the baseball field with a newfound confidence. Buffy's final statement connotes urgency through its directness, in turn enhancing emotional affectivity, as she questions, 'make your choice, are you ready to be strong?'

This question is answered in the following scene as the slayers collectively defeat the First, causing Sunnydale and, in turn, the Hellmouth to implode. With this rejection of the powerful individual heroine in favour of collective gendered action against patriarchal domination, Levine argues that *Buffy* ends 'on a note that both opposes post-feminism and

supports third-wave feminism' (2007: 184). Like the other female-fronted series discussed in this chapter, *Buffy* ends on an ambiguous note. The final shot depicts a preoccupied Buffy surveying the damage of their battle, ignoring her friend's and sister's questions of what they are going to do now. However, her enigmatic smile here suggests a more positive ending (Figure 7.3).



Figure 7.3 The final shot of *Buffy* (722 'Chosen').

The central difference between the finale of *Buffy* and the finales of *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* is the heroine's relationship to the social. All three series end on ambiguous notes, as is characteristic of the finales of fictional television narratives more widely, which enable polysemic interpretations. However, nevertheless, a particular understanding of sexualised abuse is privileged. Both *Veronica Mars* and *Hex* privilege an individualised understanding of sexual violence in their finales. The heroine's battle against patriarchal domination is rooted in personal choice – Ella chooses Leon over saving the world in a heteronormative romance plot that obscures Leon's previous sexually violent behaviour and in turn, recuperates hegemonic ideals of gender. Similarly, the sexual harassment in the finale of *Veronica Mars* is reframed as an individual mystery-to-be-solved and, further, as her personal vendetta against Jake Kane. The finale of *Buffy* is more provocative, explicitly drawing connections between dominant constructions of gender and power. The fight at the end of the series is not only about male sexual violence against women – instead, they are fighting to stop an apocalypse, which will take both male and female victims. However, it is significant that the figure of the slayer is always female and that the demons residing in the Hellmouth at the series' end are male.

Conclusion

Of all teen drama series, US female-fronted programmes have been the subject of the most scholarly attention, particularly *Buffy*, *My So-Called Life* and *Veronica Mars*. This work typically derives from a feminist perspective. Feminist television scholars tend to ultimately judge these series' worth according to whether they perceive the heroine to be a regressive return to or a transgressive subversion of patriarchal stereotypes. Thus, as Chapters 1 and 2 indicate, underlying this work is an implicit polemical belief that these texts are either governed by a patriarchal, sexist ideology or are able to transcend this dominant ideology to incorporate feminist discourses. Even in scholarship which rejects the rigidity of this approach and interrogates the ambiguities in these texts' and heroines' relationships to feminism, ultimately judgments over whether this heroine constitutes a feminist role model or not are difficult to resist. For example, after examining the complexities of *Veronica Mars*' engagement with various different feminist discourses, Braithwaite (2008) ends by celebrating the series for conforming to her own interpretation of feminism, echoing Brunsdon's (2006) definition of the ur feminist article described in Chapter 1.

Rather than labeling these three series as good or bad, in this chapter I have considered what they offer in relation to representations of sexual violence. Notably, they are more open than the other series I have examined in this thesis, facilitating, but not necessitating, a feminist understanding of sexual violence. For example, through the heroine, female responses to sexual violence are promoted. Perpetrators are often recurring (and can be sympathetic) male characters, complicating the notion privileged in other series that sexual violence is the domain of individual bad men that are divorced from 'normal' males. In turn, connections between normative constructions of gendered sexuality and violence are provocatively kept in view.

This is not to say that these programmes consistently privilege a feminist reading. Indeed, feminists are not treated well on-screen. However, *Hex*, *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars* regularly foreground feminist concerns, including sexual violence, in a way that makes it difficult to simply transform these issues into something else or to see them as isolated aberrations of an otherwise functioning patriarchy. It is more likely than the other series discussed in this thesis for sexual violence to be connected to normative constructions of gender and sexuality, even if an ideological stance is not always consistent.

In this chapter, I have looked at British and US series alongside each other and highlighted similarities in their treatment of sexual violence. However, it is important to

note that there remain significant structural differences between these programmes that alter the kinds of stories told (or not) about sexual violence. I explore these differences further in the following and final analysis chapter, in which I look at *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*, situating these programmes in relation to a specific history of youth programming in the UK.

Chapter 8

***Sugar Rush* and *Skins*: Sexual Violence in British Teen Drama Series**

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I considered US and British teen drama series side by side, highlighting structural and narrative patterns across sexual violence narratives in female-fronted series. Representations of teenage sexual violence are common in both US and British series. However, there remain distinct structural differences between these texts. Indeed, as I shall go on to discuss, in popular discourses surrounding these British teen drama series, their opposition to US programmes is frequently emphasised (Behrens, 2008). This chapter considers these differences in more depth, focusing exclusively on *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*.

An immediately apparent difference is the shorter narrative length of British series. Further, from mapping the sexual partners of central teenage characters, it is apparent that, in this condensed series form, British programmes feature many more sexual representations (see Appendix B). This heightened teenage sexual activity is not only related to the shorter length of the series, but to the different discursive construction of the figure of the teenager in British programmes. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, US teen drama series use issue-led storylines, such as narratives about underage drinking or drug consumption, to highlight the fallibility and associated vulnerability of teenage characters. Despite the tendency from the late 1990s onwards for these storylines to be more self-conscious and less didactic, in these programmes the vulnerability of the liminal teenage stage between childhood and adulthood remains a central concern. In contrast, the contemporary British teen drama series *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* emphasise teenage independence, rebellion and nihilism. In turn, in these programmes, underage drinking, drug use and casual sex are portrayed not as problems-to-be-solved, but as everyday facts of teenage life.

The justification for this portrayal of teenage behaviour in a British context as largely consequence-free is often tied to claims of authenticity. There is no academic scholarship on contemporary British teen drama series, to my knowledge, but popular discourse surrounding these programmes tends to focus on whether their representations of teenagers and teenage life are authentic or not (Bidisha, 2008; Behrens, 2008). As I

illustrated in Chapter 2 in relation to feminist television criticism on the progressive heroine, the notion of authenticity is highly contentious. Thus, in this chapter I want to see if the narrative and ideological patterns uncovered by structural analysis of representations of sexual violence in *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* can suggest new ways of reading these texts that transcend this authentic/inauthentic polemic. Structuralism allows me to do this, concerned as it is with exploring the discursive nature of cultural constructs rather than their accuracy in representing reality (Fiske, 1987: 131).

I am not arguing that these representations necessarily reflect teenagers or teenage life in Britain, but rather that the different discursive construction of the figure of the teenager in a British context has crucial implications for the representation of sexual violence in these series. This construction is inextricably linked to both the history of British youth programming that these series emerge from and their scheduling in post-watershed timeslots on E4, Channel 4's digital youth-oriented channel. Thus, before I move on to analyse sexual violence narratives in the programmes themselves, it is firstly important to contextualise them within a broader history of British youth programming, looking specifically at the birth of Channel 4 and E4, as well as wider academic and popular debates surrounding youth television in this context. I will then examine their overall structure, outlining differences and similarities between the relationship of sexual violence, narrative and series' structure to US programmes, before moving on to analyse these representations in *Sugar Rush* and then *Skins*. Finally, I will offer some conclusions.

British Teen Drama Series in Context

The national differences in the construction of the teenager can be attributed to the different programming histories from which US and British teen drama series emerge. As Osgerby (2004) explains, US teen drama series emerged from family and, later, teenage sitcoms that centred around white, middle-class characters. In contrast, as Moseley asserts, in Britain 'the teenager was constructed as a problem to be addressed and to be educated, but is rarely the focus of specific provision (apart from pop and rock music programming) other than this remit' (2007: 191-2). This is reflected in television scholarship on British youth and television, which tends to focus on magazine and music formats (Lury, 2001; Osgerby, 2004). Historically, there has been a dearth of dramatic programming aimed specifically at older British teenagers. US texts dominate teen television scholarship and, as Chapter 4 illustrates, the genre is marked by American constructs such as the figures of cheerleaders, geeks and jocks as well as events such as proms and homecoming dances. This leads Moseley to argue that the teenager is 'profoundly American' (2001: 43).

Moseley provides reasons for this lack of British teen dramas, analysing the relationship between British teenagers and television between 1968 and 1982 (2007: 182-97). Attributing this neglect to the liminality of the teenage stage, she argues that:

It is this 'in-between-ness' (between production departments, schedules and audience sectors), in conjunction with rapidly decreasing drama budgets...that has generated the long-standing scarcity of dramatic programming for teenagers in the history of British television (2007: 187).

Indeed, teenagers and television have traditionally been seen as antithetical constructs, as Lury (2001) explores in her work on British youth television. To illustrate this opposition, she appropriates some of Sarah Thornton's (1995) oppositional categorisations between youth and mainstream culture, substituting the latter for television (2001: 13):

YOUTH (<i>us</i>)	TELEVISION (<i>them</i>)
Alternative	Mainstream
Hip/cool	Straight/square/naff
Independent	Commercial
Authentic	False/phoney
Rebellious/radical	Conformist/conservative
Specialist genres	Pop
Insider knowledge	Easily accessible information
Minority	Majority
Heterogeneous	Homogeneous
Masculine culture	Feminine culture

Table 8.1 'Youth and television: opposing constructs?' (Lury, 2001: 13, adapted from Thornton, 1995: 115).

As a result of this perceived opposition between teenagers and television, there is a prevailing view that teenagers seek their entertainment outside the home. Thus, in Britain, the teenage audience has traditionally been addressed by educational programming aimed at schools and colleges, rather than through entertainment. It is this historical construction of the British teenager in need of 'information, education and regulation' (Moseley, 2007: 185) that British teen drama series are often at pains to disprove or reject, in contrast to the didactic model that still characterises US series.

As Moseley's study ends in 1982, the same year as Channel 4 began transmissions, she focuses exclusively on ITV and, more so, the BBC. The birth of Channel 4 had crucial implications for the construction of the British teenager on television and for the

development of contemporary British teen drama series. Built into its remit from the outset, it had a public service requirement to ensure that its programming catered to special interests and minority groups, including youth, and represented concerns that were not already being addressed by the existing BBC/ITV duopoly. Further, it was to encourage innovation and experimentation in the form and content of this programming. The channel's mode of production, based on commissioning programmes from a newly emerging independent sector, was viewed as central to fostering this diversity (see Harvey, 1994: 102- 32 and Doherty et al, 1988 for fuller discussions).

In 1982 Channel 4 began transmissions, with a strong emphasis on trying to capture the accelerating social and cultural change in contemporary Britain. This was reflected in programming that challenged the taken-for-granted centrism of British life, caused offence with its supposedly left-wing biased political and ideological debates and extended the range of subjects that had previously been shown on television by representing a broad variety of lifestyles. Specifically in relation to sex and sexuality, the channel got into trouble with sectors of the popular press for its frank sexual representations (Harvey, 1994: 117- 9).

As part of its marginal address, Channel 4 specifically targeted youth audiences. Its soap opera, *Brookside* (1982- 2003), (created by Phil Redmond who would later go on to create teen soap *Hollyoaks*), for example, incorporated a greater number of teenage characters than existing British soaps. But it was primarily its youth programming that was instrumental in challenging the historical construction of the teenager in need of adult guidance (Hobson, 2008: 115). Magazine and music shows, such as *The Tube* (1982-1987) and *Network 7* (1987-1988) emerged that constructed British youth differently. As journalist and broadcaster, Miranda Sawyer, observes in relation to *The Tube*: 'in its early years Channel 4 seemed to be sneaking an entire new generation in the back door whilst the adults tapped their watches at the front' (2008: 226). There was a sense that Channel 4 in this period was addressing British youth on their level, free from adult agendas (although, notably, it was still largely adults who made and fronted these programmes).

Lury explores this construction of British youth by television in the late 1980s and early 1990s, making complex connections between the emergence of the post-baby boom generation and the rise of British 'yoof' television at this precise moment in history. She argues that, 'this coincidence encouraged an aesthetic sensibility that combined "cynicism and enchantment". This meant that although they were "not going to be taken for suckers", young people continued to invest in the pleasures and places produced by television' (2001: 1). Ambivalence, then, is central to British youth programming, as I will go on to discuss in relation to *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*.

Although she maps this aesthetic across a number of channels, Lury includes a chapter on *Network 7*, which she argues was endemic of many ‘yoof’ aesthetics such as wobbly camerawork, odd angles, bad-taste in-jokes, garish graphics and an amateur presentation style that was punctuated with frequent mistakes (2001: 30). Further, the programme refused to create an illusion of real space and frequently disrupted the traditional studio setting. The programme’s cynicism and enchantment, derived from this aesthetic style and the mistakes, simultaneously distanced viewers by drawing attention to the programme’s artifice and drew them in by establishing an exciting atmosphere of spontaneous, chaotic and unpredictable live-ness. As she explains, ‘it is exactly a mixture of belief and disbelief that characterizes the yoof TV aesthetic. It is an uneasy *play* between investment and alienation, between an outsider’s distaste and detachment and the insider’s investment and knowledge’ (2001: 42, emphasis original).

Lury’s study ends in 1995 and does not include analysis of any British dramas, but this sensibility and aesthetic of ‘cynicism and enchantment’ translates onto *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*. For example, *Sugar Rush* displays many of the aesthetic markers identified by Lury such as handheld camerawork, odd angles, fantasy sequences, Kim’s direct address to the camera and her often self-conscious voice-over. *Skins*, while appropriating an aesthetic style that is arguably closer to a British social realist soap, similarly displays ‘yoof’ characteristics in its bad-taste humour which relies upon the juxtaposition of unlikely audio-visual elements. The first episode of season two, for example, features two of the central male characters being verbally sexually propositioned by eight year-old girls. Both series also oscillate between cynicism and enchantment in their modes of address, which has crucial consequences for how sexual violence narratives are framed.

This tonal inconsistency is characteristic of the genre more widely. Moseley argues that many US teen drama series offer ‘a broad address in which both engagement with the melodramatic/emotional and knowing distance can be accommodated’ and uses *Dawson’s Creek*’s blend of self-consciousness and intense emotionality as an example (2001: 43). Yet, British teen drama series offer a more pronounced example of this broad address, in which the contrasting sensibilities of cynicism and enchantment transcend editing or witty one-liners to be mapped directly onto the image. For example, the season one finale of *Skins* ends with central character, Tony, being hit by a bus. The scene is shocking, dramatic and upsetting as Tony lies bleeding and unconscious in his younger sister’s arms. However, the emotion of the scene is undermined when the camera suddenly and surreally cuts to Tony’s best friend, Sid, singing directly into the camera. Later, the other core cast members including Tony join in. The interplay here between Tony’s dramatic accident and the self-conscious musical number has a profound effect on the tone of the scene, making it

difficult to discern how to react. It is implied that Tony is seriously injured, yet his singing undermines this and suggests that his accident should not be taken seriously. The same is true for sexual violence narratives in the programme, as I will go on to explore.

In this way, then, British teen drama series can be viewed as a development or continuation of the 'yoof' aesthetic of British programming of the previous decades, which, as Lury demonstrates, transcends channel identities. Yet, their scheduling on E4, Channel 4's digital channel, is also relevant to understanding their sexual representations. Indeed, the legacy of the early days of Channel 4 is evident in these programmes in the ethnic, racial, sexual and class diversity of their characters. For example, the core teenage cast of seasons one and two of *Skins* features a black female, a Muslim male and a homosexual male, while *Sugar Rush* focuses on, Kim, a lesbian protagonist, and her unrequited crush on her heterosexual black best friend, Sugar. As noted in Chapter 4, while US teen dramas also often feature central non-white or homosexual characters, this tends to be an either/or scenario.⁷⁷ In particular, the centrality of a lesbian perspective in *Sugar Rush* can be seen as part of a longer tradition of provocative homosexual portrayals on Channel 4 (Arthurs, 2004: 117).

Further, both series' frank treatment of sex, which is apparent in their pilots, can be linked to a wider history of explicit sexual representations on Channel 4. *Sugar Rush* opens with a fantasy sequence of Kim and Sugar kissing before cutting to Kim masturbating under her duvet with the aid of her electric toothbrush, while the pilot of *Skins* opens with sexually explicit dialogue as Tony tries to organise for Sid to lose his virginity and the episode goes on to feature full male nudity. By contrast, onscreen representations of nudity and masturbation are absent from US teen drama series which are subject to stricter regulation. Illustrating this, the DVD box sets for both *Skins* and *Sugar Rush* bear '18' certificates, in contrast to the '15' certificates on the box sets of *The O.C.* and *Smallville*. The sexual frankness of *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* can also be attributed to their timeslots: *Skins* aired between 10 and 11pm, while *Sugar Rush* aired from 10:50 to 11:20pm.⁷⁸ Popular journalistic discourse of the programmes, particularly *Skins*, echoes early concerns about the effects of Channel 4's programming. Both *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald* ran articles in 2007 and 2008, respectively, blaming *Skins* for a new trend for out-of-control house-parties held by teenagers across the UK (Payne, 2007; Murphy, 2008).

⁷⁷For example, *Friday Night Lights* features a central black teenager, but no homosexual characters while, conversely, *Dawson's Creek* has a central gay character but no non-white teenagers.

⁷⁸ US teen drama series typically occupy a 9pm timeslot and are often repeated at earlier times during the day. At time of writing, Channel 4 shows episodes of *Smallville* on weekdays at 8:55am.

Yet, it is important to note that *Skins* and *Sugar Rush* emerge in a different climate to this early programming on Channel 4. In the 1990s, Channel 4 was subject to much criticism over views that it was abandoning its public service approach in favour of increasing ratings by importing US texts. This includes the importing of US teen drama series such as *Dawson's Creek* in the mid-to-late 1990s. Debates about the relationship between the channel's public service values and enterprising tendencies (often viewed as mutually exclusive) have plagued Channel 4 since its inception and prevail to this day. Two essays in a recent edition of *Screen* interrogate this tension (Ellis, 2008; Malik, 2008). E4 emerged in 2001 directly in response to these debates. The rationale for the channel was linked to growing evidence from market research that Britain's youth no longer felt a need for public service broadcasting (Born, 2003). As a senior strategist for Channel 4 argued, 'There are lots of kids who just would not turn on a BBC channel; they don't think it's got anything for them. So if public service values are going to remain in touch with that generation, E4 is a bridgehead into essentially alien territory' (quoted in Born, 2003: 782). One of the ways that E4 targets this youthful demographic is through its teen drama series. It currently imports US programmes *Smallville*, *Veronica Mars*, *Roswell* and *One Tree Hill*. However, as Georgina Born argues, there is a tension between E4 directly targeting niche youth audiences and 'the universality principle at the heart of PSB', an argument that Channel 4 counter by claiming that they target youth 'attitudinally rather than demographically' (2003: 791).

In Chapter 4 I identified many formal similarities between British and US series, yet, as I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, a key distinguishing feature, and one that has crucial implications for the representation of sexual violence, is the discursive construction of the teenager. In a British context, this construction is inextricably linked to claims of authenticity (which I will return to later in this chapter). For example, in relation to *Skins*, British journalist Edward Behrens argues:

Dawson's Creek was the grandfather of teen drama. It allowed teenagers on screen and it allowed them to have their own fantasy lives. It was the first and it was thrilling. But, my God, on reflection, what a fantasy it was. *Skins* may be the coolest show on TV, everyone may want to be in their gang but, thank God it's not in Capeside. Thank God it's true, thank God it's Bristol. Well, thank God it's true at least (2008: 230).

It is notable that Behrens sets *Skins* up here as the 'other' to *Dawson's Creek*, reflecting popular journalistic discourses surrounding the programme more widely (Wilson, 2010; Lee, 2007). In a recent interview, the producer of *Skins*, John Griffin, argued that, unlike other US television dramas, 'we don't rape people for ratings' (Wilson, 2010: 23). One of the series' teenage female writers explained that, 'In *The O.C.* or *Gossip Girl* there's all

these male characters coming to save the female characters. Whereas I think we've got good, strong female characters' (Wilson, 2010: 23). Yet, despite the vulnerability of the teenage stage being less of a prominent concern in British teen drama series, representations of teenage sexual violence remain prevalent.

Across *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* there are four sexual violence narratives. *Sugar Rush* features a rape storyline while *Skins* features storylines involving the threat of rape, homophobic abuse and stalking. Both of the rape narratives feature central female characters as victims and non-recurring males as perpetrators. Like rape or attempted rape narratives in US series, it is these storylines that occupy the most privileged narrative position, coinciding with the penultimate (in *Skins*) or final (in *Sugar Rush*) episodes of seasons. In contrast, the homophobic abuse and stalking narratives occur at the start of season two of *Skins*. Both storylines feature the homosexual central male character, Maxxie, as the victim and marginal teenage characters as perpetrators, namely a gang of males and a female respectively.

A key distinction between sexual violence narratives in US and British series relates to their shorter length. British sexual violence narratives lie somewhere in between the episodic and over-arching storylines of US series. In *Skins*, the homophobic abuse storyline is the only strictly self-contained episodic narrative, but the others span only two episodes each. With the overarching sexual violence narratives in *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*, the main bulk of these narratives takes place entirely in one episode, although the threat is established (albeit very briefly) in the previous episodes. The episode or episodes following the sexual attack feature its (indirect) consequences, but the actual moment of sexual violence is rarely referenced.

For example, the penultimate episode of season one of *Sugar Rush* ends on a cliff-hanger with Kim receiving a phone-call from Sugar, who sounds incredibly distressed. The season finale details the reasons for this distress, namely her rape by a man on the beach and her subsequent stabbing of him. The first three episodes of season two feature Sugar in prison, but in the episode summaries, provided by Kim's voice-over, no mention is made of the rape. Instead, it is insinuated that Sugar is in prison because she swore at the judge presiding over her stabbing case. *Skins'* series structure differs from *Sugar Rush*. While *Sugar Rush* has a centralised perspective, *Skins* features an ensemble cast. Each episode is named after and follows a different member of this cast, focusing on personal issues concerning their relationships. In this way, the series favours short, concentrated bursts of character development and, in terms of sexual violence, this abuse is always inextricably linked to a particular character's personal identity.

Their condensed narrative form means that sexual violence storylines in British series share many characteristics with US episodic sexual violence narratives. The actual moment of sexual violence is brief and is typically physical in nature, after which the narrative then diverts away to focus on other themes and issues. The emotional aftermath on the victim is rarely explored, although this can be attributed not just to the shorter length of these narratives but to the construction of the British teenager as much less vulnerable than their US counterparts. Another key difference between US and British narratives is their treatment of the perpetrator. Although, like US narratives, the perpetrator tends to disappear shortly after the moment of abuse, they are afforded much more sympathy in British series. This reflects the ideological ambivalence at the heart of these programmes, which can make it difficult to discern a clear stance on sexual violence. I will now go on to explore these narrative and structural patterns in more detail in relation to *Sugar Rush*.

Sugar Rush

In the previous chapter I examined the structural patterns governing representations of sexual violence in US and British female-fronted teen drama series. However, I omitted a discussion of *Sugar Rush* because sexual violence in this series is positioned differently in relation to series' structure. Instead of coinciding with the series' pilot and finale like the other female-fronted programmes, its singular sexual violence narrative coincides with the season one finale. The conformity of *Hex*, also a British series (which emerged a year before *Sugar Rush* and was made by the same production company), to the patterns of US female-fronted series indicates that this structural difference cannot be solely attributed to national context and that other factors need to be taken into consideration.

The main distinguishing feature between *Hex* and *Sugar Rush* is the sexuality of their protagonists. The presence of sexual violence in the pilots and finales of the other female-fronted series indicates that the vulnerability of youthful female sexuality is a central concern of these programmes. Importantly, it is youthful female *heterosexuality* that is marked as a dangerous space. As Kim, the heroine of *Sugar Rush*, is a lesbian, the series focuses primarily on her relationships with other women and there are few male characters. The absence of gendered power imbalances in her relationships means that risk is diminished. Instead, it is her heterosexual best friend, Sugar, who is the victim of sexual violence. Nevertheless, Sugar's rape has a profound effect on Kim and is inextricably linked to her transition from childhood to adulthood.

Like all teen drama series, the pilot of *Sugar Rush* opens with a series of events that operate to disrupt the pre-existing off-screen equilibrium: Kim moves to Brighton with her family, meets new friend, Sugar, and later in the episode, discovers that her mother is having an extramarital affair. In this way, the pilot establishes the series' premise, which is concerned throughout with Kim's negotiation of these events, focusing predominantly on her parents' turbulent relationship and her romantic obsession with Sugar. Sugar represents a disruptive force in Kim's life, as signalled in the pilot when she frames Kim for shoplifting to save herself. Their relationship is characterised by a power imbalance: Kim desires Sugar, Sugar knows this and frequently manipulates Kim's desire to her advantage.

By episode nine of the first season, the pre-existing equilibrium appears to have been restored and is directly related to Kim's entry to adulthood. Having fallen out with Sugar in the previous episode, Kim begins to move past her unrequited crush, coming out publicly for the first time and securing a date with fellow lesbian, Beth. Further, after Kim sternly talks with her mother, her parents appear to be reconciling. The optimism of the episode is marked through upbeat non-diegetic guitar music as Kim dresses for her date. A close up of her smiling face accompanies her voice-over as she states, 'for the first time, I felt like an adult'. She leaves for her date just as her parents begin a (supposedly) conciliatory talk. Striding confidently towards the camera, her voice-over happily declares, 'Everything seemed to be turning out alright'. Yet, notably, while the tone of her voice-over is happy and relaxed, the reflective past-tense used throughout the series as well as the use of the word 'seemed', suggesting artifice, establish a foreboding atmosphere.

Immediately following Kim's assertion, the equilibrium is disrupted when the camera cuts to Kim's parents who decide to remain separated. Additionally, Kim arrives for her date, only for Sugar to interrupt by phoning her. As Kim answers her phone, the camera pulls in closer on her face and her smile fades as she listens to Sugar's distressed pleas for help. Kim's facial expression reveals a mixture of alarm, irritation and resignation. It is only then that Sugar is revealed for the first time in the episode. She is framed in close up, covered with blood and crying. The episode ends on a cliff-hanger with the camera cutting between a close up of Kim's alarm as she stares at Beth and of Beth turning to greet her. Beth's smile fades as she sees Kim's face and Kim turns and runs.

Episode ten picks up where the previous episode left off with Kim searching for Sugar. It opens with a black screen accompanied by Kim's weary voice-over, 'the things we do for love...', before the camera cuts to a long shot of Brighton beach. Kim's voice-over has a bitter, cynical edge as she complains, 'I was standing up a fit girl I could have a decent chat with and snog, for a slapper who treated me like shit and only ever snogged me to turn on loser guys'. Yet, this irritated tone jars with the urgency of the image as Kim

runs across the beach, shouting Sugar's name. Sugar is finally revealed huddled beside a pillar, crying in heaving breaths. Kim runs to her and crouches down and the camera pans to Sugar's bloody hands.

The emotional resonance of the scene derives from the reversal of the usual power dynamics that characterise Kim's and Sugar's friendship. They are framed together as Kim assumes control, wiping away blood from Sugar's face and asking her calmly and patiently what happened. This is the first time in the series that Sugar's vulnerability is highlighted and represents a marked change from her usual cocky confidence. This is further illustrated by the two girls' appearance: Sugar wears a rust-coloured, fur coat, her hair is messy and she is covered in dried blood in contrast to Kim who is freshly made up for her date and wears a clean, white coat. It is significant that Kim assumes an almost maternal role here, as Sugar's mother is never depicted on-screen. Like the victims of sexual violence in US teen drama series, upon the figure of Sugar not just sexual violence, but a number of social problems are mapped. She is poor, working-class, promiscuous, has little parental support and frequently shoplifts, gets drunk and smokes cannabis. Yet, in keeping with the anti-moralistic tone of British teen drama series, the narrative does not dwell on her behaviour prior to the attack. Finally, Sugar discloses that she stabbed someone before staggering down the beach. Later in the episode, the viewer learns that Sugar was raped.

This sexual violence narrative is interwoven with a narrative involving Kim's parents splitting up. When Kim returns home to find money for Sugar so that she can escape town, she is confronted by her mother informing her she is leaving. Kim's child-like vulnerability is highlighted as she sits on the edge of her bed and cries, with her head held in her hands. However, almost immediately, the scene undermines this emotional moment, providing an example of the aesthetic sensibility described by Lury as 'cynicism and enchantment', with the jarring of audio-visual elements. A facial close up reveals Kim's pain as she deals with her parents' separation, while at the same time jaunty, upbeat non-diegetic muzak begins. On the one hand, the scene is highly emotional: Kim is visibly distressed, her parents have recently broken up and, at this point, there is no indication why Sugar stabbed the man and if he is even alive. Kim could be complicit in murder. The image emphasises Kim's distress as she hurriedly packs to join Sugar, stealing her mother's credit card and jewellery in the process. On the other hand, the audio elements of the scene jar with the visuals and operate to distance the viewer from this emotion. Muzak connotes stasis. It is traditionally listened to while waiting in an elevator or on-hold on the phone. Kim's voice-over further alienates the viewer by self-consciously referencing the season finale when she smugly questions, 'why stick around for the boring finale when you can co-star in an adventure of your own?'. This alienation is heightened by the arrival of

Kim's younger brother who reminds her, 'don't forget your toothbrush!', a comment that is at once a humorous intertextual reference to another youth television programme as well as an in-joke for dedicated viewers who know of Kim's reliance on her electric toothbrush to masturbate.

The scene could be read as distancing viewers from the serious issue at hand, similar to the way that US series use witty self-conscious dialogue or interweave serious storylines with comedic narratives. Yet, in the following scene, Kim and Sugar directly discuss the rape while sitting in a roadside café, outside Brighton. Sugar reveals that she had consensual sex on a beach with a man, whose friend then raped her. She stabbed him in self-defence. Her speech is privileged here, the camera cutting between close ups of the two as Kim listens supportively. Sugar tries to nonchalantly assimilate the attack into normal sexual practices, dismissing the violence of the rape by joking, 'Oh, just took me by surprise, that's all. I've never done two before... [laughs]...it's the kind of thing a girl needs to prepare for right?' Yet her speech is punctuated by sighs and tears and eventually she questions, 'Why are they like that with me, Kiz? Why don't they all fall in love with me...?' In this way Sugar connects the rape to normative constructions of gendered sexuality.

This relationship between gender, sexuality and power is interrogated further in a later scene as this extract of dialogue illustrates:

SUGAR: I should've just let that guy finish off, shoot his load and be done. We could've been down Las Vegas [a club] just now having a right laugh about it

KIM: 'cept it's not funny

SUGAR: would've been. Me and the gruesome twosome.

KIM: [sighs in exasperation]

SUGAR: What was that for?

KIM: He raped you.

SUGAR: No he didn't.

KIM: Course he did!

SUGAR: I didn't go down to the beach for a picnic. I knew what I was there for.

KIM: No you didn't. You never do, you're always so out of it.

SUGAR: [scornful] So you're saying I'm raped everytime I have sex?!

KIM: Yeah! Practially...it's fucked up Sug, really it is.

SUGAR: Yeah, but so is rubbing fannies with other girls...

KIM: Don't talk to me.

SUGAR: What do you care anyway?

KIM: Because you're smart, gorgeous, funny and cool and you're wasting yourself on guys who don't give a shit.

Aside from the frank sexual dialogue and swearing, this scene is reminiscent of similar scenes in sexual violence narratives in US series, in which male characters espouse feminist sentiments by lecturing female victims on their lack of self-worth and respect. The key difference though is that in those narratives, because it is the central male who is espousing feminist sentiments, ideals of heterosexual romance remain untroubled. In this narrative, however, Kim makes a direct connection between dominant constructions of gendered sexuality, which privilege male domination and female submission, and male sexual violence against women.

In *Sugar Rush* sexual violence functions as a catalyst for Kim and Sugar to have sex, thus resembling overarching US sexual-violence-as-advancing-romance storylines. Like these US narratives, after Sugar's rape, the narrative focuses on the emotional aftermath of the attack on her while Kim comforts and soothes her. It is this period of comfort that leads to them having sex. Yet, unlike US narratives, because of the shorter length of British series, this storyline is highly condensed. This is heightened further in *Sugar Rush*, in which, unlike *Skins*, each episode lasts only twenty minutes. This narrative takes place over less than twenty-four hours. The rape (as well as the perpetrator) are not depicted on-screen and instead the narrative begins by detailing the immediate aftermath of the attack on Sugar which ultimately leads to her and Kim having sex later the same night. The concentrated narrative space in British teen drama series provides a partial explanation for the short space of time between the rape and consensual sex in this storyline, but this can also be attributed to Kim's gender and sexuality. The absence of a gendered power dynamic between the two girls means that Kim poses no physical threat to Sugar. In these types of narratives in US series, romance following sexual violence operates to disguise the relationship between normative constructions of gendered sexuality and violence by restoring the desirability of heterosexual romance. In contrast, in *Sugar Rush* this

relationship is kept in view, addressed and problematised. It is precisely this critique of heterosexual practices that renders Kim a desirable, albeit temporary, choice for Sugar.

The relationship between the two girls takes on a fairytale quality as, after stealing a car and driving to London, they use Kim's mother's credit card to book themselves into a penthouse suite in a hotel. There, they share a romantic bubble bath while drinking champagne and looking out over the lights of London (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1 Sexual violence as a catalyst for romance in *Sugar Rush* (110)

At the same time, the narrative becomes centrally about Kim's anger at Sugar's constant manipulation of their friendship. After Kim verbally confronts her, Sugar kisses Kim tenderly as if to apologise. As she does so, the opening bars of a non-diegetic romantic pop song begin. The song is significant and is used throughout the first season to underscore moments of intensity in Kim's desire for Sugar. The kiss lasts almost thirty seconds with facial close ups shot from different angles fading into one another. The music links this scene to the next which opens the next morning to reveal an overhead long shot of the two girls in bed, implying that they have had sex. Kim stretches her arm over Sugar, pulling her closer and they are framed in an overhead close up as they face each other. Kim stares at Sugar who gradually opens her eyes and smiles, rubbing Kim's nose with her own. The music temporarily stops as the camera cuts to Kim's parents emerging from a police car outside the hotel but begins again as the camera cuts back to the bed. The camera then alternates between a shot of the hotel corridor as Kim's parents walk towards the room, flanked by officers and a final close up of Kim smiling directly at the camera, her voice-over happily proclaiming, 'don't you just love happy Hollywood endings?'

Kim's final line signals the ambiguity of the season ending. On the one hand, it is ironic as the viewer knows that, seconds from now, Kim and Sugar will be apprehended. Further, as Sugar is heterosexual, there is little sense that this will lead to anything more,

thus renewing the series' central concern with Kim's unrequited obsession for a second season. On the other hand, there is a sense that Kim will not care as she finally has what she has desired for the whole season. Either way Sugar's rape becomes obscured as her relationship with Kim takes precedence.

At the same time, though, the feminist argument that female-fronted series offer a particularly conducive space for exposing and critiquing gender norms applies doubly for a series like *Sugar Rush* that features a lesbian protagonist. By framing the narrative from Kim's point of view while also allowing Sugar space to describe the aftermath of the rape on her, the storyline directly addresses the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. The dialogue between the two girls critiques the connection between dominant constructions of gendered sexuality and male sexual violence against women. Further, as there are no central male characters in the series (aside from Kim's father), masculinity is not recuperated and the prioritisation of a homosexual relationship following the rape does not restore heterosexual norms either.

Skins

Skins, from the outset, established itself in direct opposition to the discursive construction of the teenager in need of guidance (favoured by US series) by emphasising the intense independence of its nihilistic teenage characters and offering a frequent and largely consequence-free portrayal of underage drinking, drug use and promiscuous sex. It claimed to be free from a moralising adult agenda, as this comment from Jamie Brittain, the twenty-something year old son of the father/son duo who created the programme, illustrates. In response to his father, Bryan Elsley, who was running ideas past him for a new teen series, he argued:

You should do something for kids; but not the usual crap. Get rid of all the moralising, the constant pumping rock music that old people seem to think kids like, the fantasy sequences, the flashbacks, the wobbly camera work, the middle aged portrayal of emotions, the stupid issue based stories, the crap voice-overs, the glammed up 20-something actors who play them. Get rid of all that shite and do something FUNNY instead (2007).

Elsley explains further:

We're obsessed with drugs, with drinking, with sex. Young people accept these things as givens. Lecturing them is hopeless. Understanding them is impossible. You can only watch and wonder at how well the vast majority of them survive (2007).

Elsley's suggestion that *Skins* offers an authentic, unmediated window into teenage life in Britain is reinforced by the production of the programme, which includes teenage

voices on its writing team, and by its casting. The series features mainly amateur teenage actors who, despite being highly attractive, are much less polished than their US counterparts: they often have greasy hair, dirty clothes and spots. The promotional materials for the series also trade upon this notion of authenticity by connecting the series to the real world through *Skins*-sponsored parties at nightclubs throughout Britain and by creating facebook and myspace profile pages for its characters. As I illustrated in the introduction to this chapter, debates about the authenticity of the series' representations enter into popular journalistic discourses. On a 2007 episode of *Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe* (BBC4, 2006-), British comedian Stewart Lee complained that the teenagers on *Skins* were overly 'confident, sassy and cool' and thus, unrealistic. Conversely, Behrens argues that an 'authentic attitude' is 'everywhere in the *Skins* DNA' (2008: 229).

The programme's claims of authenticity are often used to provide a justification or rationale for its representations of teenage life. In this way, it echoes arguments surrounding the depiction of social issues on British soap operas (see Geraghty, 1995: 71-2). Yet where *Skins* differs considerably is its rejection of didactic issue-led storylines in favour of portraying underage drinking, drug use and casual sex as everyday facts of teenage life about which nothing can be done. The series has been accused of glorifying this behaviour and indeed, the trailer for season one capitalised upon the 'shock value' of the programme by depicting the teenage characters at a wild house party, drinking, taking drugs and having sex.⁷⁹ Youthful exuberance is connoted and celebrated through fast-paced editing, colourful clothing and the soundtrack which uses the rebellious anthem of *Gossip*'s 'Standing In the Way of Control'. It ends with a long-shot of the teenagers passed out on a mass in the bed (Figure 8.2). Crucially, it is not teenage vulnerability or fallibility that is emphasised here, but teenage rebellion, excitement and nihilism.

⁷⁹ Christopher Gildemeister of the US Parents Television Council condemns *Skins* for its representations of teenage life, arguing that, 'The PTC has frequently warned parents about the content on such American-made teen-targeted programs as the CW network's *Gossip Girl* and its new *90210*. These programs glorify teens drinking, smoking marijuana and having sex, both with adults and with one another; but contrasted with their overseas counterpart *Skins*, they appear almost tame' (2008).



Figure 8.2 Teenage nihilism in the trailer for *Skins*

However, despite the creators' assertion that they represent a version of teenage life that is free from a moral adult agenda, an analysis of representations of teenage sexuality in the series reveals that ideologically it is fairly conservative and very similar to the US series that it attempts to distance itself from. Despite the diversity of its ensemble cast, the dominant point of view presented in the series is that of the heterosexual white male, through Sid and Tony. Tony has the most episodes devoted to him and in interviews Brittain and Elsley claim that they based Sid and his father on themselves. (Unsurprisingly, Sid's father, although certainly not flawless, is the most well-rounded and sympathetic adult in the series.) Further, the narrative privileges Sid and Tony's relationships, both with each other and their girlfriends. In particular, Sid's relationship with his girlfriend, Cassie, provides a meta-narrative across the two seasons. Non-white and homosexual characters are marginalised in that the only central characters to share episodes are the Muslim, Anwar, and his homosexual friend, Maxxie.

Significantly, the sexual culture of the series fits neatly with Byers' (1998) analysis of representations of teenage sexuality in *My So-Called Life* discussed in Chapter 4. Byers argues that these representations are gendered, with male characters' sexualities portrayed as fluid and flexible in contrast to the sexual agency of female characters, which almost always results in loss (2007: 13). Although *Skins* seemingly celebrates teenage sexual activity as consequence-free, it is notable that the same gendered sexual norms apply. For example, when central female characters, Cassie and Michelle, have non-monogamous sexual experiences, they are depicted as devoid of sexual desire and the sex is closely followed by scenes of them crying. The other central female in the series, Jal, remains virginal until season two when she finally has sex with Chris. This leads to her getting pregnant and deciding to have an abortion when she realises that Chris has a terminal,

genetic disease. In contrast, the sexuality of central males in the series is portrayed much more positively and they frequently have promiscuous sexual experiences without suffering any negative consequences.

This interplay between the series' construction of the teenager as highly independent and rebellious and teenage life as free from moral-lessons-to-be-learnt and the conservative ideology at its centre has key implications for its representations of sexual violence, as I shall now go on to explore. For example, the depiction of teenage characters as sexually experienced, knowledgeable and confident means that their sexual victimisation is much rarer. This is illustrated by an episodic homophobic abuse narrative involving Maxxie (201 'Maxxie and Tony').

This narrative opens comically, with Maxxie's father, Walter, practicing a dance routine to diegetic country music with his dog for the upcoming dog show. Overhead and shot from below, six unsmiling teenage males lean over the railings of the housing estate where Maxxie lives, watching. Their inscrutable facial expressions, identical stances, similar heights and casual dress makes it difficult to distinguish one from another, marking them as an imposing mass. In the following shot the camera is positioned just below Walter, revealing the intensity of his concentration and his obliviousness to the boys overhead. The music fades as the camera cuts to Maxxie, sauntering past the gang. Dressed in a pink and maroon striped t-shirt, a pale blue jacket and a gold necklace, he is othered from the outset.

The camera focuses on each boy as they turn to stare, laughing loudly and moving threateningly towards Maxxie. Their sexually explicit and homophobic dialogue is punctuated with abusive swear words as they mock him. The music is no longer audible at this point, highlighting Maxxie's isolation, out of his father's view of sight. His isolation is further highlighted by the framing: Maxxie is framed alone while the gang are framed alongside each other. Yet, throughout this volley of abuse, Maxxie remains silent, still and relaxed, with an amused smile playing across his face as he listens with his hands thrust into his pockets. He seems completely unbothered by their taunts, at worst only mildly irritated. Humour further neutralises the threat as one of the boys' homophobic comments veers into homoeroticism when he goes too far in describing Maxxie's sex-life. Silence descends, the only audible sound is the squawk of nearby seagulls, as the gang stare incredulously and confusedly at the outburst of the boy.

Although Maxxie does become more fearful of the gang as the narrative develops, his independence and, specifically, his sexual confidence (he has been open and unapologetic about his sexuality from the outset of the series) have crucial implications for how the narrative unfolds. As discussed in Chapter 6, in US homophobic abuse narratives,

perpetrators are rarely depicted and the solution to the ‘problem’ lies with the homosexual character. Once they ‘come out’, the threat disappears and often the homosexual character disappears also. By contrast, in this narrative, homophobic abuse operates as a catalyst for Maxxie and Dale – the only one of the gang to be given a name and (partial) back story – to kiss.

Towards the end of the episode, the abuse becomes physical when Maxxie is targeted outside a party in the woods. Threat is established even before the gang are revealed, by the shadowy lighting and eerie silence in contrast to the loud party inside. Suddenly twigs snap underfoot and Maxxie’s breathing quickens indicating his fear. The viewer is aligned with his point of view as he sees a figure lurking in the shadows. Gradually the gang reveal themselves, surrounding Maxxie. Fast-paced non-diegetic music begins, the beats intensifying the sense of urgency as Maxxie escapes with the gang in pursuit. The camera cuts to a medium shot of his legs, emphasising the speed at which he runs. Whoops and cheers can be heard as the gang chase but the camera remains on Maxxie. As he draws to a halt, seemingly having out-run his abusers, the music stops and his heavy breathing is audible as he mutters ‘tossers’. He seems irritated here, not necessarily afraid, although the speed at which he ran indicates his fear of getting caught. Suddenly he is whipped out of the frame as Dale jumps on him, wrestling him to the ground. The two men roll a short distance before Dale pins Maxxie to the ground and kisses him. This positioning suggests Dale’s power but again Maxxie looks more confused than fearful. Indeed, he laughs, raising himself up to rest on his elbows, and explains, ‘Dale, you can’t just treat me like shit and then just...just...ah, fuck it!’ The camera cuts to a close up of Maxxie looking Dale up and down as he smiles, pulls Dale towards him and kisses him.

Maxxie’s exclamation of ‘fuck it’ is significant here, echoing the motto of his friend, Chris, who is arguably the most nihilistic of the teenage cast. The nihilistic attitude that underpins the series makes it difficult to take sexual violence seriously. Indeed, despite his initial fear while running from the gang, Maxxie’s sexual confidence renders him more in control and powerful than the still-closeted and self-loathing Dale. In US episodic sexual violence narratives, perpetrators of sexual violence are typically portrayed as villains and afforded little back story. Although little is known about Dale’s background in contrast to Maxxie, he is afforded more sympathy here. This ambivalent portrayal of perpetrators extends more widely across the series. For example, in the following episode, the narrative focuses on Sketch, a marginal female classmate of the core cast, as she stalks Maxxie (202 ‘Sketch’). The series’ character-of-the-week structure offers an insight into her life which enables her to transcend good/evil binaries.

On the one hand, Sketch is depicted as highly obsessive and unstable. Her room is covered in photographs of Maxxie, taken without his consent, she keeps a diary of his behaviour and leaves anonymous gifts for him at school. Her desire to secure the lead in the school play opposite Maxxie leads to her accusing the drama teacher of sexual harassment when he rejects her and drugging Michelle, the existing lead. Visually and aurally she is coded as monstrous. Her costumes link her intertextually to cinematic villains: she dresses as serial killer, Hannibal Lecter from *Silence of the Lambs* at an Oscar-themed costume party and her usual outfit of trousers, a shirt and braces resembles Alex's (Malcolm McDowell) costume in *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). Further, close ups of her inscrutable facial expression as she stares at Maxxie are often accompanied by eerie, non-diegetic, screeching music. On the other hand, the narrative provides an insight into the motivations behind her behaviour, revealing her lonely and difficult home-life as the solitary carer for her severely disabled mother.

Indeed, the character-of-the-week structure of *Skins* has important implications for how sexual violence narratives are framed. In 'Sketch', it operates to provide a multi-dimensional view of the perpetrator of sexual violence by focusing on her personal life, yet notably although Sketch features in the series for the rest of the season, she is never fully integrated in the group and remains peripheral. This structure is similarly tied to personal identity in a season one sexual violence narrative involving Tony's young sister, Effy (108 'Effy'). Yet unusually, despite the episode's title, it is not Effy that this narrative primarily focuses on, but Tony. Indeed, sexual violence here is framed as a narrative about Tony's character development and is part of a long chain of events that highlight Tony's sexually manipulative behaviour. As such, some background information is required.

Throughout season one, Tony is portrayed as arrogant, manipulative and verbally and psychologically abusive. He constantly undermines his best friend, Sid, and frequently cheats on his girlfriend, Michelle. Further, he often verbally taunts her, nick-naming her 'Nips' after her different sized nipples and heightening her insecurity about her appearance. An oral school report that he delivers on the role of power in sexual relationships makes his position clear when he concludes that 'sex plus power equals fun'. In episode 106 ('Maxxie and Anwar'), Tony performs fellatio on Maxxie, reasoning that he is bored. Michelle sees and splits up with him in the following episode (107 'Michelle'). She then begins dating Josh, a non-recurring male teenager who attends the local private school. In jealousy, Tony devises a plan to split them up. He takes (consensual) sexually explicit photographs of Josh's sister, Abi, (with whom Tony has previously cheated on Michelle) and texts the photos to Michelle from Josh's phone. Michelle believes Josh sent them and disgustedly dumps him, but still refuses to reconcile with Tony. In the following

episode, Josh takes revenge on Tony by luring Effy to a party, injecting her with drugs until she passes out and then threatening Tony with an ultimatum: Josh will only call an ambulance for Effy if Tony has sex with her.

Once again, the hedonistic lifestyle that the teenagers live in the series has crucial implications for the way the narrative unfolds. Although younger than the other characters in the series, Effy is portrayed as incredibly wild. In the pilot episode, Tony is forced to cover for her with their parents when she sneaks out, dressed in highly revealing clothing, late at night. She only returns at breakfast the next morning. As a peripheral character, the narrative rarely focuses on where she goes, establishing her as a mysterious figure which is heightened by the fact that she refuses to speak. The sexual violence episode emphasises her nihilistic behaviour, following her as she sexually propositions an elderly man on the bus, goes to a party at a warehouse and kisses and takes drugs with a random boy. Even when Josh later injects her with drugs, she does not protest. Again, like the homophobic abuse narrative, this nihilism detracts from the violence being inflicted upon her.

Yet, although the narrative emphasises her behaviour prior to the attack (like US narratives), it does not operate as a warning about Effy's behaviour but, rather, as a warning to Tony. She is visually and narratively marginalised after passing out and there is no sense that she learns a lesson about the possible consequences of her wild behaviour. Indeed, in the few seconds of screen-time she is afforded following her drugging and 'attack', she appears to feel no anger or any other emotion whatsoever, in keeping with her general state of blank, speechless composure. In the third season, she is more nihilistic than ever.

Instead, the sexual violence narrative focuses predominately on Tony and is interwoven with other storylines, involving his friends excluding him from their social activities, which further highlight the effects of his behaviour up to this point. This isolation from his friends leads to Tony being vulnerable and alone as, after receiving an anonymous tip-off, he searches for Effy at a party. This party is marked as different from the normal world of the series, through the lighting, camerawork and soundtrack. When Tony enters, the space is bathed in red light and the camerawork alternates between tracking shots that follow Tony around and mobile handheld camerawork from Tony's point of view, increasing the viewers' disorientation. Further, the party is populated by unfamiliar non-recurring teenage characters from the private school; characters who are often marked as oppositional to the core teenage cast by their different class.

As Tony enters the room where Josh and Effy are, the music gradually fades out and the lighting becomes naturalistic (although still shadowy). Framed in a medium shot, leaning over the table, Josh appears normal in contrast to the other teens populating the

space; he is calm, relaxed and friendly as he casually gestures to Tony where Effy is. A close up of her face reveals that she is unconscious before the camera pans up to Tony's alarmed reaction. From then, the non-naturalistic aesthetic returns. As Tony frantically searches for his phone to call an ambulance, mobile camerawork intensifies the urgency and the editing seems to skip, repeating a close up of his face. Suddenly Josh shatters the phone and provides Tony with the ultimatum that unless he has sex with Effy, he will not be allowed to take her to hospital.

A comparatively lengthy twenty-five second shot shows Tony, incredulous, preoccupied by concern for Effy as he tries to pick her up before Josh enters the frame behind him and pins him to the billiard table. The camera cuts between close-ups of the two as Josh goads Tony with sexually explicit comments about his sister. A facial close up reveals Tony's anguish as he shuts his eyes, breathes heavily and pleads desperately with Josh. Josh releases him only to punch him to the ground and hold his foot over his neck. Again a lengthy twenty second shot of Tony's facial expression emphasises his pain and fear as Josh starts to undress him and reminds him that 'she's dying over there!' Softly, through his tears, Tony pleads with Josh. The camera cuts to a distorted low angle shot of Effy in the foreground and Tony and Josh behind, reminding viewers of the peril she is in. Finally, Josh lets Tony go, slapping his face lightly as if it was all a joke and declaring, 'here endeth the lesson'. The camera pulls closely on Tony's shocked and traumatised expression as a tear rolls down his cheek.

Indeed, the narrative operates less as a warning about Effy's behaviour, resonating with the series' treatment of drug use as an everyday fact of teenage life, and more as a lesson for Tony about the consequences of his sexually manipulative behaviour. Immediately following this scene, Tony mutters to Sid that 'it's all my fault' and in the car, on the way to the hospital, the camera lingers on a close-up of his sad and shocked facial expression. Effy is largely obscured (Figure 8.3).

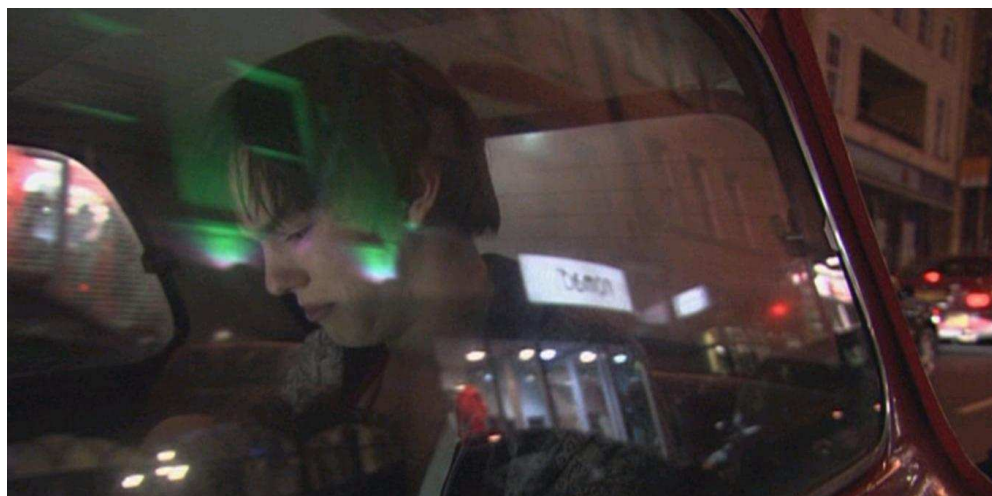


Figure 8.3 Tony privileged over Effy in *Skins* (108 'Effy')

The dialogue of the episode's final scene, which takes place between Tony and Sid in a hospital corridor, reinforces that this is centrally a narrative about Tony, his personal development and moreover, his relationships with other people, especially Sid:

TONY: I know I can be a wanker sometimes, but everyone loves that...don't they? Ball-busting, turning heads wherever I go...people like that, I like people liking that...then I start to feel distorted because I'm more than that. I don't wanna be a wanker. I don't Sid. Effy knows that. She loves me for who I really am. God, I sound like fucking Lionel Ritchie

SID: I quite like Lionel Ritchie

TONY: All I know is, when I was scared tonight, and I was a bit, I wanted you there. Effy's different, I sort of own her because she's my sister but with you, I really wanted you there and then you were with the car

SID: Thing is Tony, you sort of own me too...mostly in a good way.

The dialogue directly references Tony's power over Effy and Sid and indeed, this narrative is centrally about the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. The sexual violence narrative is positioned as the culmination of a long history of Tony's sexual manipulation of the people surrounding him. Josh threatens Effy and Tony with rape as revenge for Tony taking sexually explicit photographs of *his* younger sister and manipulating Michelle into thinking that Josh took them. Thus, the narrative creates parallels between two different forms of gendered sexual abuse since although Abi consented to having her photograph taken, she did so under the false pretence of helping Tony with an art project.

Yet, at the same time as the narrative highlights Tony's sexually abusive behaviour, as is characteristic of the series more widely, it also operates to render him a more

sympathetic and likeable character by highlighting his vulnerability and concern for Effy. Although parallels are made between Josh and Tony's behaviour, the heinous nature of Josh's ultimatum and the *physical* threat he poses to Effy, in contrast to Tony's primarily psychological manipulation of Abi and Michelle, mark him as distinctly more villainous than Tony. In the previous episode, for example, there are hints that Josh is unstable when he reveals to Michelle that he has to take drugs to keep his 'obsessive, sociopathic tendencies' in check.

The upper-class/middle-class divide between Josh and Tony further operates to differentiate them. In British teen drama series, issues of class are intertwined with sexual violence narratives in a way that is much more polarised than in US series. Although US series, such as *The O.C.* and *Veronica Mars*, also focus on class issues, the protagonists are able to oscillate between different class groupings relatively smoothly. The viewer is invited to sympathise with working-class (Ryan), lower middle-class (Veronica) and upper-class (their friends) perspectives in both programmes through the central characters. In contrast, British teen drama series firmly align the viewer with a middle- or working-class point of view. In *Skins*, upper-class characters (with the exception of Posh Kenneth) are portrayed negatively as lacking self-awareness and are largely comedic figures. In turn, this renders the abusive nature of Tony's treatment of Abi less visible too, as she is primarily an unsympathetic, villainous character in the series.

All three of the sexual violence narratives in *Skins* are less about the relationship between normative constructions of gendered sexuality and violence and more about issues of personal identity; they thus fail to connect sexual violence to the broader gendered social structures that enable and permit this abuse. In this way, despite the creators' wishes to establish *Skins* as the antithesis to these programmes, its representations of sexual violence are similar to those in US series. However, this emphasis on the personal cannot simply be attributed to the wider teen drama series genre, but to the particular series' structure of *Skins*. In this context, sexual violence storylines are embedded within episodes about individual characters and issues concerning their personal identity so that in 'Effy', for example, the sexual violence narrative operates to further Tony's character development. There are other narrative differences between US and British series evident in these storylines. For example, as we have seen, perpetrators of sexual violence are treated much more ambivalently in *Skins*, and are afforded slightly more back story which, in turn, renders them slightly more sympathetic. Further, the discursive construction of the teenager as independent and sexually confident in *Skins* affects how sexual violence narratives unfold and, as such, there is much less emphasis on the emotional aftermath of the abuse on the victim. The overall ethos of *Skins* complicates ideological readings of

representations of sexual violence in the programme. The nihilistic sensibility that underpins the series' teenage characters obscures the seriousness of the sexual violence committed upon them. Maxxie quickly excuses Dale's behaviour in favour of kissing him, while Effy is obscured altogether following her drugging. This makes it difficult to take these sexual violence representations seriously or to discern a clear, didactic stance on this abuse.

Conclusion

A comparison of US with British teen series allows me to identify persistent themes that attach themselves to the figure of the 'teenager' in both contexts. Both British and US teen drama series are underpinned by an assumption that sexual violence is an inevitable part of teenage life. There are also representational, narrative and ideological similarities that cut across these programmes, allowing me to challenge the dominant critical view of the teen drama series as a 'profoundly American' genre (Moseley, 2001: 43). Both US and British series position female victims of sexual violence in need of protection, largely feature non-recurring male perpetrators and offer individualised understandings of sexual violence that are divorced from the gendered inequalities that underpin this abuse.

However, important differences arise between these programmes too. As the vulnerability of the teenage space is a less prominent concern in British programmes, there is much less emphasis on the fear and victimisation of teenage characters. The seriousness of these narratives is also often diffused by humour or by a cynical mode of address. Further, as indicated by Sketch and Dale in *Skins*, perpetrators are often portrayed in a much more ambivalent manner than in US series and are afforded more sympathy.

The ideological ambivalence that surrounds sexual violence storylines in *Skins* and *Sugar Rush* echoes Lury's work on British youth television between 1987 and 1995. She argues that ambivalence is a key feature of the way that television constructs youth at this time, explaining that in a climate of widespread unemployment and insecurity for this youthful generation, ambivalence was actually a useful emotion (2001: 10). While she notes that the programmes she considers are not reflective of young people, they encouraged a specific way of coping with the demands of this particular generation. She explains that, 'an ambivalent incorporation into the fluctuating and chaotic processes of contemporary society may be the most appropriate, if not strictly the most subversive, tactic for young people' (2001: 11). While it is important to acknowledge that Lury refers to a very specific time period and to a generation that transcends teenage years, her

comments about the relationship between youth and youth programming in Britain still apply to *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*.

This ambivalence has a profound affect on the way that sexual violence is framed in these series. For example, the aesthetic of cynicism and enchantment directly affects the tone of *Skins* and *Sugar Rush*, making it difficult to take the sexual violence narratives seriously. This is exacerbated by the series' rejection of didacticism in favour of nihilism, which makes it hard to discern the programme's ideological stance on this abuse.

However, it is important to note that comparing *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* feels forced. While *Sugar Rush* is also ideologically inconsistent, the centrality of a lesbian perspective allows for a rare interrogation of the relationship between normative heterosexual practices and sexual violence as outlined by the dialogue between Sugar and Kim following Sugar's rape. In turn, the homosexual romance narrative that follows the rape, unlike the heterosexual romances discussed in Chapter 6, significantly does not recuperate hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality. Thus, while sexual violence in *Sugar Rush* is positioned differently in relation to series' structure than in series fronted by heterosexual heroines, like *Hex*, *Veronica Mars* and *Buffy*, this programme creates a space for a counter-hegemonic understanding of sexual violence.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the kinds of stories about sexual violence enabled (or not) by the teen drama series genre, looking at US and British programmes from 1990 to 2008. This thesis has considered how these storylines are positioned in relation to series' and generic structures and has revealed a variety of different forces shaping how these narratives are framed. These include issues of narrative form, generic hybridity, the gender and sexuality of the series' protagonist and medium specificity as well as particular social and broadcasting contexts. In this final chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings of this research project as a whole and consider how this work relates to the findings of existing teen and feminist television scholarship. The chapter then moves on to reflect upon the methodologies employed and their potentials and limitations. I conclude by exploring some other directions in which this research may develop in future.

Findings and Contributions

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, scholars of screen representations of sexual violence have argued that fictional narrative forms are often better equipped to depict this issue than factual forms, such as news programming (Cuklanz, 1996; Moorti, 2002). Where factual formats are viewed as relatively 'closed', television dramas, in particular, have been identified as a more 'open' space in which more challenging representations may be constructed (Schlesinger et al, 1983; Henderson, 2007: 12). Further, devalued 'feminine' genres, in which category the teen drama series could be included, have been identified as more receptive to airing the victim's experiences of sexual violence than other programming (Rapping, 1992; Cuklanz, 1996). Henderson specifically pinpoints the soap opera as a format in which 'controversial or socially sensitive issues are played out' (2007: 12).

Teen drama series, then, with their soap-like formal organisation and thematic concerns, hold many potentials for representing sexual violence. The prevalence of these storylines, in the first place, indicates that these programmes foreground central feminist concerns. Their ensemble casts mean that multiple perspectives on sexual violence are enabled. In turn, through these diverging understandings of this abuse, these programmes

often self-consciously deploy rape myths, such as victim-blaming, to then interrogate them. The emotional aftermath on the victim is frequently emphasised and, moreover, because these victims are typically central female characters, they establish strong levels of identification and sympathy.

This thesis has been concerned with exploring the different forces that shape sexual violence storylines, developing upon previous work into screen depictions of this abuse by broadening my definition of sexual violence and by considering the context of these storylines in relation to wider series' and generic structures. There are two dominant narrative forms of these storylines in teen drama series: the self-contained episode and the overarching storyline that spans multiple episodes. Their different narrative structures affect how sexual violence is framed.

Feminist and teen television scholars have frequently derided episodic issue-led narratives for failing to deal with issues in any depth. Indeed, the narrative closure enforced on these storylines means that there is little emphasis on the aftermath on the victim and only tenuous solutions to the problem of sexual violence are offered. Perpetrators are almost always non-recurring males who disappear shortly after the violence has taken place. They are overwhelmingly shadowy figures, marked as distinct from the series' 'normal' males. In this way, connections between dominant constructions of heterosexual masculinity and violence are contained. Further, with the exception of social issue episodes, sexual violence is rarely a central concern of these narratives, but rather, is used to highlight other issues (the vulnerability of female youth) or themes (the mystery-of-the-week or a romance plot). These diversions, along with the tonal inconsistencies that permeate the genre and the happy endings that are typical of these storylines, mean that the seriousness of sexual violence often becomes obscured.

These findings, then, reinforce dominant scholarly arguments about the limitations of episodic issue-led narratives. However, by analysing these narratives in more detail and by paying close attention to the wider series' and generic context in which they emerge, I am able to complicate this reading. For example, while social issue or problem-of-the-week episodes have been widely dismissed, it is notable that these are one of the few narrative forms to display a serious commitment to engaging with sexual violence directly, exploring its aftermath on the victim, offering multiple points of view on the abuse through didactic dialogue and, in the process, interrogating rape myths. This is not to say that these narratives unproblematically promote feminist discourses on sexual violence, but that, unlike the other episodic sexual violence narratives discussed in this thesis, they offer a rare space to address sexual violence *as* sexual violence.

Episodic narratives in the supernatural series *Buffy* and *Smallville* also offer possibilities to challenge patriarchal understandings of sexual violence. These programmes frequently foreground the relationship between this abuse and hegemonic constructions of gendered sexuality by establishing parallels between (literally) monstrous perpetrators of sexual violence and human males and by positioning central (usually male) characters in the role of perpetrator. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to divorce sexual violence from more pervasive examples of gender inequalities. At the same time, though, it is important to note that the crime and punishment framework that underpins these episodes constrains their possibilities for promoting counter-hegemonic understandings of this abuse. As is characteristic of episodic sexual violence narratives more widely, these programmes privilege personal solutions to this abuse rather than proposing the need for social transformation. Further, sexual violence is transformed into a mystery-to-be-solved, often detracting from the sexual violence at hand.

Where episodic narrative forms have traditionally been criticised for failing to deal with issues in sufficient depth, serial forms have been praised for providing deeper levels of characterisation and complexity when dealing with issues. In many ways, overarching narratives in teen drama series do allow for a more detailed exploration of sexual violence. There is much more emphasis on the aftermath of the abuse on the victim, focusing on a range of emotional responses, such as fear, denial, confusion, shame and, less commonly, anger. The victim's residual fear following a sexual attack can span several episodes, suggesting that trauma cannot always be neatly contained. Again, like episodic sexual violence narratives, victims are commonly central female characters, allowing for a significant level of identification and empathy and also enabling them to move beyond their victim role to encompass other identities as series progress. While perpetrators tend to remain non-recurring male characters, as in episodic narratives, there is slightly more emphasis on their back story. Although the viewer is discouraged from identifying with them, reasons, however tenuous, are offered for their behaviour. These storylines tend to be more open than episodic sexual violence narratives, lacking narrative closure. This lack of resolution offers the potential for polysemic readings on sexual violence. Further, the serial structure enables particular storylines to be revisited at a later date. While this is rare, it has the potential to highlight the long-term effects of sexual violence on victims and establish connections across different forms of abuse (see Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion).

At the same time, however, these possibilities for facilitating feminist discourses on sexual violence are constrained by the genre's conventions as well as by the gender of the particular series' protagonist. As Chapter 6 indicates, overarching sexual violence

narratives are often embedded within heteronormative romance plots, which operate largely to reaffirm rather than challenge hegemonic gendered ideals. Notably, these romance narratives are given greater narrative significance than sexual violence storylines, often coinciding with season finales. Perpetrators remain non-recurring male characters who are differentiated from 'normal' men. Indeed, sexual violence frequently becomes the domain for a display of ideal masculinity, as central male characters heroically protect and comfort female victims against these individual 'bad' men. It is these same central male characters who commonly espouse feminist sentiments on sexual violence and instruct female victims on the appropriate responses to this abuse. Although overarching sexual violence storylines allow for a deeper exploration of the aftermath of this abuse, overall, females have little agency. Instead, male responses are privileged, particularly in series that feature male protagonists. Rarely does sexual violence operate to establish a shared identity between female victims based on an awareness of the prevalence of gendered abuse. Instead, it is largely presented as an aberration of an otherwise functioning patriarchy.

What these findings reveal is that while the different narrative forms of episodic and overarching sexual violence storylines affects the kinds of stories told (or not) – such as the emphasis on the victim and issues of resolution – overall, sexual violence holds similar narrative and ideological functions. In both cases, an individualised understanding of this abuse is promoted. Sexual violence is overwhelmingly framed as a personal problem for the teenager, rather than a more widespread social or political concern. As such, the need for social transformation is rarely acknowledged. There is also a rare direct engagement with the topic of sexual violence, which is instead used to highlight other issues and themes and to drive other plots forwards.

These findings resonate with the findings of previous research into televisual depictions of sexual violence by Cuklanz (1996, 2000), Projansky (2001) and Moorti (2002). These scholars argue that in these representations feminist redefinitions of sexual violence are inextricably bound up with patriarchal understandings of this abuse and of gendered sexuality. While this could open up space for debate, more often than not, these narratives contain rather than enlarge discussions about the relationship between gender, sexuality and power, designed as they are to appeal to and entertain as wide an audience as possible. Televisual fictional narrative forms may be more open than factual forms, but this is a potential and not a given.

As Cuklanz (2000), Projansky (2001) and Moorti (2002) note, television's treatment of the topic of sexual violence is neither uniform nor simplistic. Analysing representations of sexual violence in fourteen series alongside each other not only enables

me to determine representational, narrative, ideological and structural patterns, but also allows me to account for intra-genre diversity and, in turn, to identify factors that might facilitate more challenging portrayals of sexual violence. Different programmes have different agendas and self-images, impacting upon the way in which sexual violence narratives are shaped. From the didacticism of *Beverly Hills* in the early 1990s to the nihilism of *Skins* in the late 2000s, my focus on an eighteen year period has enabled me to discern developments across the genre over time.

While all of the series I have examined are ideologically inconsistent – incorporating some feminist understandings of sexual violence and rejecting others – in British series, this ambivalence is even more pronounced. Albeit in relation to a slightly different time period, Lury notes that this ambivalence, manifested in what she terms ‘cynicism and enchantment’, underpins British youth programming more widely. She uses this term to describe not only a viewing sensibility, but also an aesthetic style and tone. While a blend of self-consciousness and melodrama is identified by Moseley (2001) as a trait of teen drama series more widely, in British series this cynicism is even more pronounced, making it hard to discern a clear ideological stance on sexual violence.

As Chapter 7 indicates, series with heterosexual heroines from 1997 onwards – *Buffy*, *Hex* and *Veronica Mars* – are also inconsistent in their ideological stance on sexual violence. However, these three series facilitate a feminist understanding of sexual violence more than any other programme I have looked at in this thesis. In these programmes, central feminist concerns, including those surrounding sexual violence, are regularly articulated in a way that makes it difficult to transform sexual violence into something else or to see it as divorced from normative constructions of gendered sexuality. Instead, this abuse is more likely to be linked to gender inequalities, even if the programmes’ ideological stance is not didactically consistent.

Overall, what I hope to have demonstrated in this thesis is that teen drama series do not speak to a singular ideology. Instead, multiple perspectives on sexual violence are enabled. As Seiter et al note, the concept of ‘preferred readings’, developed in relation to factual television formats, raises a number of problems when applied to fictional forms (1989: 223). As they explain, ‘The hierarchy of discourses in television’s fictional texts tends to be more ambiguous, preventing narrative closure on all levels of the text, and thus rendering the text more open to divergent readings’ (1989: 223- 4). Although I acknowledge that teen series enable polysemic interpretations of sexual violence, nevertheless, I believe that ‘preferred readings’ can be discerned through close textual analysis. The genre’s openness should not invalidate this research, but rather, points to the

value of examining sexual violence narratives in context. I will develop this notion further in the following section, when I reflect upon my methodologies.

Reflections on Methodologies

One of the aims of this thesis has been to complicate the recurring feminist critical focus on categorising televisual images as positive or negative, feminist or antifeminist. As such, I have opened up rather than contained possible interpretations of sexual violence storylines, by exploring the complex ways in which generic and medium specificities intersect with these narratives. Additionally, by providing a comparative analysis of representations of sexual violence in British series in Chapter 8, I have been able to demonstrate that the persistent theme of teenage sexual violence crosses both US and British programmes. At the same time, I have highlighted some of the ways in which these representations are shaped by the broadcasting and social context in which they emerge. Indeed, as I have emphasised throughout, teen drama series, with their interweaving storylines and ensemble cast, privilege multiple perspectives on sexual violence.

In light of this, it may seem counter-productive to turn to structuralism as one of my main methodologies, concerned as it is with imposing binary structures upon texts. It is for this reason that I supplement a structural approach with an attention to genre and medium specificity through close textual analysis. The advantage of a structuralist approach is that it allows me to precisely describe how television produces meaning, through an analysis of repetitive narrative structures. In this way, it operates as a valuable starting point from which to embark on close textual analysis. Employing this methodology means that I really *know* my object of study and, as a result, I am able to produce rigorous and nuanced analyses of sexual violence storylines. Importantly, it allows me to take into account the positioning of these narratives in relation to serial structures which, I argue, affects how storylines are framed.

However, where structuralism emphasises universal structures and a unified whole, I am also interested in uncovering contradictions. Where the structural approach became the most exciting is in relation to those programmes or specific storylines that did not fit easily with the others - for example, homophobic abuse storylines which, unlike other overarching sexual violence narratives, are not embedded within romance plots, or series with heterosexual heroines from 1997 onwards which feature sexual violence in their pilot and finale episodes. By contextualising my analyses, I can expose these fissures and begin to add to and/or complicate existing television scholarship surrounding, for example, the representation of homosexuality or teenage heroines.

From mapping where sexual violence narratives occur, close textual analysis allows me to account for recurring representational, narrative and ideological patterns in how sexual violence functions. This was important as it highlighted wider questions to be addressed about whether different types of sexual violence are positioned or treated differently and how different forces - such as narrative form, the date the narrative aired, a programme's generic hybridity, the gender of its protagonist and the broadcasting context in which it emerged - affect the kinds of stories told. Additionally, I am able to account for intra-genre diversity. From close textual analysis, for example, I was able to uncover important differences in how supernatural series depict sexual violence. In turn, there were times where I expected to find fissures and didn't. This was equally interesting, particularly in the case of British teen drama series which are structurally different from US series and so often positioned in journalistic discourses as their antithesis, but which hold many similarities in how they depict sexual violence.

Despite the contradictions and differences that emerge between members of the genre, overall, the same kinds of stories about sexual violence recur again and again: storylines that privilege individualised understandings of this abuse, divorced from the gendered social structures that enable and permit it. In this way, the programmes rarely open up a space for counter-hegemonic understandings of sexual violence. This is not to deny the possibility of resistant readings, but to stress that the agency of the viewer is set within structures. As Nelson explains, power relations constrain peoples' imaginative and political freedom (1997: 4). We understand these narratives (and television more widely) through discourses, which allow certain things to be said or thought and disallow others (Seiter, 1992: 62). Indeed, television does not present an unmediated 'window on the world', but rather, as Robert C. Allen explains, 'it constructs representations of the world based on complex sets of conventions - conventions whose operations are largely hidden by their transparency' (1992: 7). A central question of this thesis is: how do teen drama series construct their representations of sexual violence? Not, how accurately do these representations reflect the reality of sexual violence?

To return to the opening paragraph of this thesis, the normalisation of these representational conventions is reflected in the surprise people (even fans of teen dramas) express upon viewing my narrative timelines that sexual violence storylines are so prevalent in this genre. Despite being a fan of many of the teen drama series that I write about, I too was surprised by this prevalence. As a teenager, I watched *My So-Called Life* avidly and repeatedly, but never noticed Rayanne's sexual assault in the pilot episode until I embarked upon this project. To me, the pilot episode was centrally about laying the groundwork for Angela and Jordan's budding romance and highlighting Angela's age-

related fallibility and, as I indicate in Chapter 5, the series privileges that interpretation. Rayanne and the subject of sexual violence are pushed to the background. A central aim of this thesis was to highlight and, thus, denaturalise these repetitive narratives that are so familiar they often go unnoticed. (For example, despite the vast amount of feminist television scholarship on *Buffy* and despite the fact that this programme contains numerous depictions of sexual violence, very little has been written on this subject.)

Structuralism speaks of a text as if its meanings are given and fixed and only need to be uncovered. It restricts itself to textual analysis in order to determine these meanings, challenging the idea of the viewer as an individual agent who makes their own interpretations. Post-structuralist theorists have criticised what they see as an over-emphasis on the authority of the text over the agency of the viewer (Seiter, 1992: 61). In some ways, then, it may seem antithetical that this thesis, which employs a structuralist methodology, emerges from my own dissatisfaction and irritation with the way that teen television often dismisses teenage viewers as passive cultural dupes. Much more research needs to be undertaken into how teenagers actually engage with television programming that is aimed at them. This research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but would be an interesting further direction. Henderson's (2007) study of the representation of social issues in British soap operas provides a useful model for such purposes. She combines close textual analysis with a study of soap opera audiences and production contexts. This enables her to map an even wider range of forces that shape the way these social issues are presented on-screen and also to understand how audiences respond to these narratives. In the following section, I will look in more detail at possible future avenues of research.

Looking to the Future

In the past couple of years, several new teen drama series have emerged, including *Glee*, *90210*, *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009 -), *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (ABC, 2008 -), *Life Unexpected* (The CW, 2010 -), *Make it or Break It* (ABC, 2009-) and *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC, 2010-). A US version of *Skins*, to air on MTV, is in production and there are new seasons of the British *Skins*, as well as *One Tree Hill*, *Smallville*, *Gossip Girl* and *Friday Night Lights*. Additionally, while all of the above series are made to air on television, other teen dramas have been made to air online, such as *lonelygirl15* (youtube, 2006 - 8), reflecting changing viewing habits. At the time of writing, MTV is about to launch its first web-only teen drama, *Being Victor* (MTV, 2010-) (Barnett, 2010). The teen drama series is in no sign of decline and the genre continues to adapt to changing social contexts. An exploration of this latest crop of programmes as well

as of different broadcasting contexts would enrich an understanding of how the genre has developed over time.

This study has focused on sexual violence. I have developed upon existing studies of the screen representation of rape (Cuklanz, 2000; Projansky, 2001; Moorti, 2002) by broadening my definition of sexual violence to include a range of abusive behaviours. Nevertheless, there remains a risk of overgeneralisation by focusing on one issue. To counter this, where relevant I have included comparisons to other issue-led narratives, including those involving alcohol abuse, parental neglect and (non-sexual) physical violence. A valuable future direction would be to develop this research further, by using a combination of structural, genre and textual analysis to interrogate the representation of other social issues across the genre. This comparative research would allow for an even more precise identification of how these issue-led storylines are gendered and sexualised in significant ways.

It would also be productive to explore programmes with young adult characters – such as *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005 -), *Misfits* (E4, 2009), *Queer As Folk* (Ch4, 1999-2000), *This Life* (BBC2, 1996- 7), *The Secret Life of Us* (Network 10, 2001- 5) - as points of comparison to teen drama series. There are significant crossovers between teen drama series and, what Cardwell (2005) terms, 'twenty-something serials', series with characters in their early to mid twenties. Indeed, many of the programmes discussed in this thesis - *Buffy*, *Beverly Hills*, *One Tree Hill*, *Smallville* - could arguably be described as 'twenty-something serials', rather than teen series, by their fourth or fifth season.⁸⁰ Both of these genres feature a community bound by generation (and, more specifically, by their difference from preceding generations) and address, 'the problematic tensions that characterize this particular generation's identity (or their search for identity...)' (Cardwell, 2005: 126).

My specific interest in teen drama series stems from the fact that the genre is centrally concerned with issues of sexuality as well as with teenage vulnerability, making a particularly conducive context for studying representations of sexual violence. Series with young adult characters have different sexual preoccupations. These are characters who have lost their virginities and had multiple sexual experiences and partners before the diegetic world of the series begins. It could be inferred that this experience renders their sexual vulnerability less of a concern. However, the recent British series, *Misfits*, which

⁸⁰ The reason that I include these later seasons in my analysis of sexual violence is to account for storylines that are revisited at a later date as well as particular characters that are repeatedly victimised. Further, I am interested in uncovering structural patterns across these texts as a whole.

centres around a group of late teenage and early twenty-something characters who contract superhero powers while carrying out community service, indicates that this sexual vulnerability continues into adulthood, in the case of young women at least. The programme features a young female character whose ‘power’ is that she makes any man that she touches fall madly (and violently) in love with her. Sexual violence permeates her storylines as she is often overwhelmed by physical and violent male sexual attraction. As noted in Chapter 7, sexual violence is also present in the pilots of programmes that feature young adult heroines, indicating that this is a structural pattern that pervades female-fronted series more widely. A comparative analysis of teen and twenty-something drama series would enable a more precise identification of the specifically ‘teen’ elements of representations of sexual violence in teen drama series. Further, this work would indicate just how widespread these representational, narrative, ideological and structural patterns are.

A central aim of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which representations of teenage sexuality intersect with sexual violence. To do so, I have paid close attention to depictions of gender and sexuality, demonstrating in Chapter 4 the ways in which male and female sexualities are portrayed differently across the genre and considering in the following analysis chapters how these gendered sexual representations intersect with depictions of sexual violence. This central focus on gender and sexuality is accompanied by a neglect of how other identities, such as race, class and ethnicity, intersect with sexual violence. While I do consider these identities in relation to particular narratives, these discussions are brief. This neglect is partially due to nature of the genre, which overwhelmingly privileges white, middle-class characters. In almost all of the series I examined, the protagonist is white. The exception is *Skins*, which focuses on an ensemble cast, but even then it tends to be white characters that are afforded the most screen-time. This resonates with the findings of Moorti (2002), who provides a useful model for these purposes. In her 2002 book, *Color of Rape*, she pays close attention to the complex ways in which race and gender come together in televisual depictions of rape.

The tendency of contemporary feminist television scholarship to focus on autonomous viewing pleasure and programmes that scholars like has meant that more troubling representational politics, such as the depiction of race and class, have been widely overlooked. The same is true of representations of sexual violence, to which feminist television scholars display a relative blind spot. It is certainly not wrong to interrogate our viewing pleasure, but it does mean that the more urgent goals of feminism, such as challenging male sexual violence against women and critiquing the relationship between hegemonic constructions of gender, sexuality and power, are in danger of

becoming lost (Boyle, 2005b). The ubiquity of representations of sexual violence in teen drama series (as well as the lack of attention paid to these representations in feminist, teen and wider television scholarship) suggest that feminist television scholarship needs to engage with and interrogate these portrayals. One way to do this is to explore the kinds of stories about sexual violence that are told (or not told) in different contexts: from episodic to overarching narratives in US series, series with female protagonists and British programmes. By exposing the same patterns in how sexual violence functions in these narratives - patterns that are so repetitive that they seem natural and 'common-sense' - I hope that this thesis has succeeded in rendering these storylines strange and unnatural and has raised questions about why these enduring structures prevail. At the very least, I hope to have demonstrated that the teen drama series is worthy of sustained academic attention, beyond a focus on what the genre can offer to adults.

Appendix A

Beverly Hills 90210

Fox, 1990- 2000, 291 episodes

Male/Female Sibling Protagonists (Seasons 1- 3)

Ensemble Cast (Seasons 4- 10)



Core Cast

Brandon Walsh

Brenda Walsh

Dylan McKay

Kelly Taylor

Steve Sanders

Donna Martin

Andrea Zuckerman

David Silver

Cindy Walsh

Jim Walsh

Valerie Malone

Nat Bussichio

Clare Arnold

Jason Priestley (seasons 1- 9)

Shannon Doherty (seasons 1- 4)

Luke Perry (seasons 1- 6, 9- 10)

Jennie Garth

Ian Ziering

Tori Spelling

Gabrielle Carteris (seasons 1- 5)

Brian Austin Green

Carol Potter (seasons 1- 5)

James Eckhouse (seasons 1- 5)

Tiffani Thiessen (seasons 5- 10)

Joe E. Tata

Kathleen Robertson (seasons 6- 7)

Other Relevant Characters

The Cowboy

Anthony Starke (213 'Halloween')

Laura Kingman

Emily Valentine

Garrett Slan

Evan Potter

Tracey Middendorf (6 episodes, season 4)

Christine Elise (15 episodes, seasons 2, 4, 5)

David Bowe (4 episodes, seasons 5, 7)

J. Trevor Edmond (4 episodes, season 7)

Buffy the Vampire Slayer

The WB/CW, 1997- 2003, 144 episodes

Female Protagonist



Core Cast

Buffy Summers

Sarah Michelle Gellar

Willow Rosenberg

Alyson Hannigan

Xander Harris

Nicholas Brendon

Rupert Giles

Anthony Stewart Head

Spike

James Marsters (seasons 2, 4-7)

Angel

David Boreanaz (seasons 1- 3)

Cordelia Chase

Charisma Carpenter (seasons 1- 3)

Anya

Emma Caulfield (seasons 3- 7)

Dawn Summers

Michelle Trachtenberg (seasons 5- 7)

Tara Maclay

Amber Benson (seasons 4-6)

Oz

Seth Green (seasons 2- 4)

Riley Finn

Marc Blucas (seasons 4- 5)

Faith

Eliza Dushku (seasons 3- 7)

Joyce Summers

Kristine Sutherland (seasons 1-5)

Other Relevant Characters

Jonathan Levinson

Danny Strong (29 episodes, seasons 2- 7)

Andrew Wells

Tom Lenk (27 episodes, seasons 6-7)

Jenny Calendar

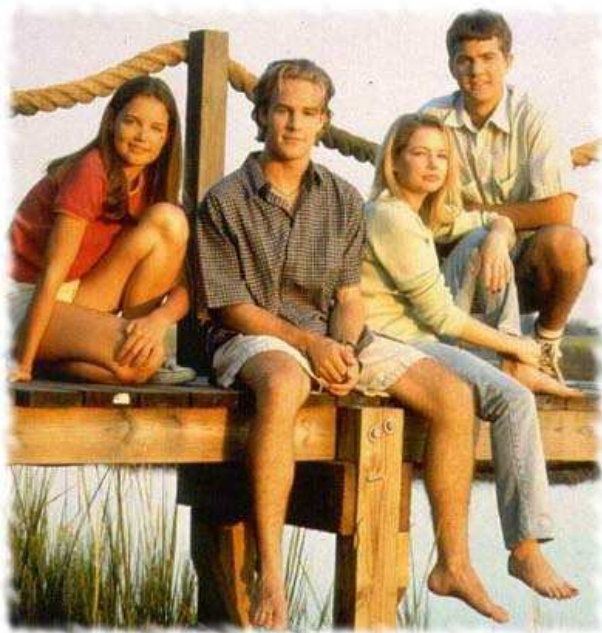
Robia LaMorte (14 episodes, season 2)

Kennedy	Iyari Limon (13 episodes, season 7)
Caleb	Nathan Fillion (5 episodes, season 7)
Warren Mears	Adam Busch (16 episodes, seasons 5- 7)
James Stanley	Christopher Gorham (219 'I Only Have Eyes For You')
Larry Blaisdell	Larry Bagby (6 episodes, seasons 2-3)
Jesse	Eric Balfour (2 episodes, season 1)
Darla	Julie Benz (5 episodes, seasons 1, 2, 5)

Dawson's Creek

The WB/CW, 1998- 2003, 128 episodes

Male Protagonist



Core Cast

Dawson Leery

James van der Beek

Joey Potter

Katie Holmes

Pacey Witter

Joshua Jackson

Jen Lindley

Michelle Williams

Evelyn 'Grams' Ryan

Mary Beth Peil

Jack McPhee

Kerr Smith (seasons 2- 6)

Andie McPhee

Meredith Monroe (seasons 2- 4)

Audrey Liddell

Busy Philipps (seasons 5- 6)

Mitch Leery

John Wesley Shipp (seasons 1- 5)

Gail Leery

Mary-Margaret Humes

Bessie Potter

Nina Repeta

Other Relevant Characters

Abby Morgan

Monica Keena (14 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Alex Pearl

Sherilyn Fenn (3 episodes, season 5)

Eric

Ryan Bittle (6 episodes, season 5)

Tamara Jacobs

Leann Hunley (9 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Freaks and Geeks

NBC, 1999- 2000, 18 episodes

Male/Female Sibling Protagonists



Core Cast

Lindsay Weir

Sam Weir

Daniel Desario

Bill Haverchuck

Neal Schweiber

Ken Miller

Nick Andopolis

Kim Kelly

Jean Weir

Harold Weir

Jeff Rosso

Linda Cardellini

John Francis Daley

James Franco

Martin Starr

Samm Levine

Seth Rogen

Jason Segel

Busy Philipps

Becky Ann Baker

Joe Flaherty

Dave Allen (10 episodes)

Friday Night Lights

NBC, 2006- continuing, 37 episodes, Seasons 1 and 2

Ensemble Cast



Core Cast

Eric Taylor	Kyle Chandler
Tami Taylor	Connie Britton
Julie Taylor	Aimee Teegarden
Tim Riggins	Taylor Kitsch
Jason Street	Scott Porter
Matt Saracen	Zach Gilford
Lyla Garrity	Minka Kelly
Tyra Collette	Adrienne Palicki
Landry Clarke	Jesse Plemons
Brian 'Smash' Williams	Gaius Charles

Other Relevant Characters

Chad Clarke	Glenn Morshower (5 episodes, season 2)
Mike	Matt McTighe (2 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Gossip Girl

The CW, 2007- continuing, 18 episodes, Season 1

Ensemble Cast



Core Cast

Dan Humphrey

Penn Badgley

Jenny Humphrey

Taylor Momsen

Serena van der Woodsen

Blake Lively

Blair Waldorf

Leighton Meester

Chuck Bass

Ed Westwick

Nate Archibald

Chace Crawford

Vanessa Abrams

Jessica Szohr

Lily van der Woodsen

Kelly Rutherford

Rufus Humphrey

Matthew Settle

Eric van der Woodsen

Connor Paolo

Gossip Girl (narrator)

Kristen Bell

Other Relevant Characters

Georgina Sparks

Michelle Trachtenberg (4 episodes)

Asher Hornsby

Jesse Swenson (2 episodes)

Hex

Sky One, 2005- 2005, 18 episodes

Female Protagonist



Core Cast

Cassie Hughes

Thelma Bates

Ella Dee

Leon Taylor

Azazeal

Malachi

Roxanne Davenport

David Tyrel

Alex

Christina Cole (8 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Jemima Rooper

Laura Pyper (13 episodes, season 2)

Jamie Davis

Michael Fassbender (13 episodes, season 2)

Joseph Beattie (9 episodes, season 2)

Amber Sainsbury (15 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Colin Salmon (14 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Jemima Abey (13 episodes, season 2)

My So-Called Life

ABC, 1994- 1995, 19 episodes

Female Protagonist



Core Cast

Angela Chase

Claire Danes

Patty Chase

Bess Armstrong

Graham Chase

Tom Irwin

Danielle Chase

Lisa Wilhoit

Sharon Cherski

Devon Odessa

Brian Krakow

Devon Gummersall

Jordan Catalano

Jared Leto

Rickie Vasquez

Wilson Cruz

Rayanne Graff

A. J. Langer

Other Relevant Characters

Delia Fisher

Senta Moses (3 episodes)

Richard Katimski

Jeff Perry (4 episodes)

The O.C.

Fox, 2003- 2007, 92 episodes

Male Protagonist



Core Cast

Ryan Atwood

Seth Cohen

Marissa Cooper

Summer Roberts

Taylor Townsend

Sandy Cohen

Kirsten Cohen

Julie Cooper

Jimmy Cooper

Kaitlin Cooper

Luke Ward

Caleb Nichol

Benjamin McKenzie

Adam Brody

Mischa Barton (seasons 1-3)

Rachel Bilson

Autumn Reeser (seasons 3- 4)

Peter Gallagher

Kelly Rowan

Melinda Clarke

Tate Donovan

Willa Holland (seasons 3- 4)

Chris Carmack (seasons 1- 2)

Alan Dale (seasons 1- 2)

Other Relevant Characters

Oliver Trask

Trey Atwood

Johnny Harper

Kevin Volchok

Taylor Handley (6 episodes, season 1)

Logan Marshall-Green (9 episodes, seasons 2-3)

Ryan Donowho (11 episodes, season 3)

Cam Gigandet (15 episodes, seasons 3-4)

One Tree Hill

The WB/CW, 2003- continuing, 106 episodes, Seasons 1 to 5

Male Protagonist



Core Cast

Lucas Scott	Chad Michael Murray
Nathan Scott	James Lafferty
Haley James	Bethany Joy Galeotti
Peyton Sawyer	Hilarie Burton
Brooke Davis	Sophia Bush
Marvin 'Mouth' McFadden	Lee Norris
Rachel Gatina	Danneel Harris (seasons 3- 5)
Dan Scott	Paul Johansson
Coach 'Whitey' Durham	Barry Corbin (seasons 1-)
Karen Roe	Moira Kelly
Keith Scott	Craig Scheffer (seasons 1- 3)

Other Relevant Characters

Skills	Antwon Tanner
James Lucas Scott	Jackson Brundage (season 5-)
Anna Taggaro	Daniella Alonso (11 episodes, season 2)

Felix Taggaro

Mia Catalano

Millicent Huxtable

Carrie

Ian Banks ('Derek')

Derek Sommers

Gabe

Michael Copon (11 episodes, season 2)

Kate Voegelé (season 5-)

Lisa Goldstein (season 5-)

Torrey DeVitto (16 episodes, season 5)

Matt Barr (7 episodes, season 4)

Ernest Waddell (4 episodes, season 4)

Mike Erwin (1 episode, season 1)

Skins

E4, 2007- continuing, 19 episodes, Seasons 1- 2

Ensemble Cast



Core Cast

Tony Stonem

Nicholas Hoult

Michelle Richardson

April Pearson

Sid Jenkins

Mike Bailey

Cassie Ainsworth

Hannah Murray

Chris Miles

Joseph Dempsie

Jal Fazer

Larissa Wilson

Maxxie Oliver

Mitch Hewer

Anwar Kharral

Dev Patel

Effy Stonem

Kaya Scodelario

Other Relevant Characters

Posh Kenneth

Daniel Kaluuya (11 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Sketch

Aimee-Ffion Edwards (7 episodes, season 2)

Abigail Stock

Georgina Moffat (7 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Josh Stock

Ben Lloyd-Hughes (2 episodes, season 2)

Dale

Matthew Hayfield (201 'Tony and Maxxie')

Angie

Siwan Morris (9 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Walter Oliver

Jim Stonem

Josie

Mark Jenkins

Bill Bailey (2 episodes, season 2)

Harry Enfield (8 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Josie Long (2 episodes, season 2)

Peter Capaldi (4 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Smallville

The WB/CW, 2001- continuing, 152 episodes, Seasons 1- 7

Male Protagonist



Core Cast

Clark Kent	Tom Welling
Lex Luthor	Michael Rosenbaum
Lana Lang	Kristin Kreuk
Chloe Sullivan	Allison Mack
Lois Lane	Erica Durance (seasons 4-)
Martha Kent	Annette O'Toole
Jonathan Kent	John Schneider (seasons 1- 5)
Lionel Luthor	John Glover (seasons 1-7)
Oliver Queen	Justin Hartley (seasons 6-)

Other Relevant Characters

Pete Ross	Sam Jones III (seasons 1- 3)
Whitney Fordman	Eric Johnson (seasons 1- 4)
Greg Arkin	Chad E. Donella (102 'Metamorphosis')
Jason Teague	Jensen Ackles (22 episodes, season 4)

Sugar Rush

E4, 2005- 2006, 20 episodes



Core Cast

Kim	Olivia Hallinan
Stella	Sara Stewart
Nathan	Richard Lumsden
Matt	Kurtis O'Brien
Sugar	Lenora Crichlow
Saint	Sarah-Jane Potts (10 episodes, season 2)

Other Relevant Characters

Tom	Andrew Garfield (5 episodes, season 1)
Beth	Laura Donnelly (2 episodes, season 1)

Veronica Mars

UPN/The CW, 2004- 2007, 64 episodes

Female Protagonist



Core Cast

Veronica Mars

Kristen Bell

Logan Echolls

Jason Dohring

Wallace Fennel

Percy Daggs III

Eli “Weevil” Navarro

Francis Capra

Keith Mars

Enrico Colantoni

Duncan Kane

Teddy Dunn (seasons 1-2)

Dick Casablancas

Ryan Hansen

Cindy “Mac” MacKenzie

Tina Majorino

Sheriff Don Lamb

Michael Muhney

Parker Lee

Julie Gonzalo (season 3)

Stosh “Piz” Piznarski

Chris Lowell (season 3)

Other Relevant Characters

Lilly Kane

Amanda Seyfried (11 episodes, seasons 1-2)

Meg Manning

Alona Tal (seasons 1-2)

Jake Kane

Kyle Secor (10 episodes, seasons 1-3)

Aaron Echolls	Harry Hamlin (12 episodes, seasons 1-2)
Cassidy “Beaver” Casablancas	Kyle Gallner (25 episodes, seasons 1-2)
Fern Delgado	Cher Ferreyra (6 episodes, season 3)
Mercer Hayes	Ryan Devlin (6 episodes, season 3)
Sarah Williams	Jessica Chastain (107 ‘The Girl Next Door’)
Carmen Ruiz	Natalia Baron (120 ‘M.A.D.’)
Tad Wilson	Jeff D’Agostino (120 ‘M.A.D.’)

Appendix D

For the narrative time-lines, please see the hard-bound copy of this thesis, found in the library of the University of Glasgow.

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Appendix C

The Four Narrative Functions of US Episodic Sexual Violence Narratives

Abbreviations

BH: Beverly Hills 90210

BtVS: Buffy the Vampire Slayer

DC: Dawson's Creek

FNL: Friday Night Lights

GG: Gossip Girl

MSCL: My So-Called Life

O.C.: The O.C.

OTH: One Tree Hill

SV: Smallville

VM: Veronica Mars

<i>Sexual Violence as Social Issue</i>	<i>Sexual violence as a warning about the vulnerability of (female) youthful sexuality</i>	<i>Sexual violence as a catalyst for romance</i>	<i>Sexual violence as a mystery-to-be-solved</i>
<i>BH</i> 213 'Halloween'	<i>MSCL</i> 101 'Pilot'	<i>OTH</i> 108 'The Search for Something More'	<i>BH</i> 109 'The Gentle Art of Listening'
<i>BH</i> 426 'Blind Spot'	<i>BtVS</i> 108 'I Robot... You Jane'	<i>GG</i> 101 'Pilot'	<i>BtVS</i> 104 'Teacher's Pet'
<i>MSCL</i> 115 'So-called Angels'	<i>BtVS</i> 205 'Reptile Boy'		<i>BtVS</i> 106 'The Pack'
	<i>O.C.</i> 321 'The Dawn Patrol'		<i>BtVS</i> 202 'Some Assembly Required'
			<i>BtVS</i> 204 'Inca Mummy Girl'
			<i>BtVS</i> 219 'I Only Have Eyes For You'

			<i>BtVS</i> 220 'Go Fish'
			<i>BtVS</i> 304 'Beauty and the Beasts'
			<i>BtVS</i> 515 'I Was Made to Love You'
			<i>BtVS</i> 606 'All the Way'
			<i>SV</i> 102 'Metamorphosis'
			<i>SV</i> 105 'Cool'
			<i>SV</i> 115 'Nicodemus'
			<i>SV</i> 119 'Crush'
			<i>SV</i> 205 'Nocturne'
			<i>SV</i> 206 'Redux'
			<i>SV</i> 209 'Dichotic'
			<i>SV</i> 211 'Visage'
			<i>SV</i> 219 'Precipice'
			<i>SV</i> 314 'Obsession'
			<i>SV</i> 403 'Façade'
			<i>SV</i> 407 'Jinx'
			<i>SV</i> 417 'Onyx'
			<i>SV</i> 603 'Wither'
			<i>SV</i> 613 'Crimson'
			<i>SV</i> 614 'Trespass'
			<i>VM</i> 107 'The Girl Next Door'
			<i>VM</i> 120 'M.A.D.'
			<i>VM</i> 210 'One Angry Veronica'
			<i>VM</i> 214 'Versatile Toppings'
			<i>VM</i> 216 'The Rapes of Graff'
			<i>VM</i> 311 'Poughkeepsie, Tramps and Thieves'

Appendix D

The Four Narrative Functions of Overarching Sexual Violence Narratives in US Teen Drama Series

<i>Sexual Violence as Advancing Romance</i>	<i>Sexual Violence as Frustrating Romance</i>	<i>Sexual Violence as a Warning about the Dangers of Choosing the Wrong Man</i>	<i>Sexual Violence as a Catalyst to Come Out</i>
<i>BH 522- 524</i>	<i>BH 532- 613</i>	<i>O.C. 317- 403</i>	<i>DC 214- 215</i>
<i>BH 925- 1006</i>	<i>BH 715- 719</i>	<i>BtVS 214- 222</i>	<i>DC 512- 514</i>
<i>SV 313- 316</i>	<i>BH 812- 815</i>	<i>BtVS 613- 620</i>	<i>OTH 209- 217</i>
<i>FNL 120- 209</i>	<i>BH 820- 822</i>	<i>BtVS 619- 708</i>	
<i>OTH 402- 418</i>	<i>BH 824-825</i>	<i>VM 101- 222</i>	
	<i>O.C. 113- 118</i>	<i>VM 222- 301</i>	
	<i>O.C. 221- 308</i>		
	<i>VM 301-309</i>		
	<i>VM 319- 320</i>		

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Teleography

21 Jump Street (Fox, 1987- 1991)
90210 (The CW, 2008-)
Alias (ABC, 2001- 2006)
Ally McBeal (Fox, 1997- 2002)
Angel (The WB, 1999- 2004)
Being Victor (online) (MTV, 2010-)
Beverly Hills, 90210 (Fox, 1990- 2000)
Bionic Woman (ABC/NBC, 1976- 1978)
Blossom (NBC, 1991- 1995)
Brookside (Channel 4, 1982- 2003)
Brothers and Sisters (ABC, 2006-)
Buffy the Vampire Slayer (The WB/CW, 1997- 2003)
Cagney and Lacey (CBS, 1982- 1988)
Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe (BBC4, 2006 -)
Charmed (The WB, 1998- 2006)
Civilisation (BBC2, 1969)
Community (NBC, 2009-)
Dawson's Creek (The WB/CW, 1998- 2004)
Degrassi: The Next Generation (CTV, 2001- present)
Designing Women (CBS, 1986- 1993)
Desperate Housewives (ABC, 2004-)
Dollhouse (Fox, 2009- 2010)
Ellen (ABC, 1994- 1998)
ER (NBC, 1994- 2009)
Felicity (The WB, 1998- 2002)
Freaks and Geeks (NBC, 1999- 2000)
Friday Night Lights (NBC, 2006-)
Ghost Whisperer (CBS, 2001- 2005)
Gilmore Girls (The WB/CW, 2000- 2007)
Glee (Fox, 2009)
The Golden Girls (NBC, 1985- 1992)
Gossip Girl (The CW, 2007-)
Greek (ABC, 2007-)

Grey's Anatomy (ABC, 2005-)
Heartbreak High (Network Ten/ABC, Australia, 1994- 1999)
Hex (Sky One, 2004 -2005)
Hollyoaks (Channel 4, 1995-)
How I Met Your Mother (CBS, 2005-)
The Inbetweeners (E4, 2008-)
Kate and Allie (CBS, 1984- 1989)
L.A. Law (NBC, 1986- 1994)
lonelygirl15 (online) (youtube, 2006- 2008)
Life Unexpected (The CW, 2010-)
The L-Word (Showtime, 2004- 2009)
Make it or Break it (ABC, 2009-)
Misfits (E4, 2009-)
My So-Called Life (ABC, 1994- 1995)
Neighbours (Seven Network/Network Ten, 1985-)
Network 7 (Channel 4, 1982- 1987)
Northern Exposure (CBS, 1991- 1995)
The O.C. (Fox, 2003- 2007)
One Tree Hill (The WB/CW, 2003-)
Oz (HBO, 1997- 2003)
Party of Five (Fox, 1994- 2000)
Pretty Little Liars (ABC, 2010-)
Prime Suspect (ITV, 1991- 2006)
Queer as Folk (Channel 4, 1999- 2000)
Roswell (The WB/UPN, 1999- 2002)
Sabrina the Teenage Witch (ABC/The WB, 1996- 2003)
The Secret Life of the American Teenager (ABC, 2008-)
The Secret Life of Us (Network 10, 2001- 2005)
Sex and the City (HBO, 1998- 2004)
Six Feet Under (HBO, 2001-2005)
Skins (E4, 2007-)
Smallville (The WB/CW, 2001-)
The Sopranos (HBO, 1999- 2007)
Sugar Rush (E4, 2005)
This Life (BBC2, 1996- 1997)
Tru Calling (Fox, 2003- 2005)

True Blood (HBO, 2008-)

The Tube (Channel 4, 1982 - 1987)

The Vampire Diaries (The CW, 2009)

Veronica Mars (UPN/The CW, 2004 - 2007)

The X-Files (Fox, 1993 – 2002)

Filmography

A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971)

The Breakfast Club (John Hughes, 1985)

I Know What You Did Last Summer (Jim Gillespie, 1997)

Pretty in Pink (Howard Deutch, 1986)

Scream (Wes Craven, 1996)

The Silence of The Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991)